Bede:
On Ezra and Nehemiah

Scott DeGregorio

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Bede
On Ezra and Nehemiah

Translated with an introduction and notes by
SCOTT DEGREGORIO

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To my family,
and the memory of my father
and grandparents

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ABBREVIATIONS

(For full bibliographic details of Bede's works, see Bibliography)

Bede, *DLS*	*De locis sanctis*, ed. Fraipont, CCSL 175
DNR	*De natura rerum liber*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 123A
De schem. et trop.	*De arte metrica et de schematibus et tropis*, ed. Kendall, CCSL 123A
De tab.	*De tabernaculo*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 119A
De templ.	*De templo*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 119A
DTR	*De temporum ratione*, ed. Jones, CCSL 123B
Epist. Ecg.	*Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum*, ed. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*
Epist. Pleg.	*Epistola ad Plegwin*, ed. Jones, CCSL 123C
Exp. Act.	*Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, ed. Laistner, CCSL 121
Exp. Apoc.	*Expositio Apocalypseos*, ed. Gryson, CCSL 121A
HE	*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors
HA	*Historia Abbatum auctore Baeda*, ed. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*
Hom.	*Homiliae evangelii*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 122
In. Cant.	*In Cantica Canticorum*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 119B
Epist. Cath.	*In epistolas VII catholicas*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 121
In Ezr.	*In Ezram et Neemiam*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 119A
In Gen.	*In principium Genesis*, ed. Jones CCSL 118
In Hab.	*In Habacuc*, ed. Hudson, CCSL 119B
In Luc.	*In Lucam*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 120
In Marc.	*In Marcum*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 120
In prou. Sal.	*In proverbia Salomonis*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 119B
In Sam.	*In primam partem Samuhelis*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 119
In Tob.	*In Tobiam*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119B
Rectract. Act.	*Rectractatio in Actus Apostolorum*, ed. Laistner, CCSL 121

XXX quaest.	*In Regum librum XXX quaestiones*, ed. Hurst, CCSL 119
Mart.	*Édition practique des martyrologes de Bède*, ed. DuBois and Renaud
Nom. loc.	*Nomina locorum ex Beati Hieronimi et Flaui Iosephi collecta opusculis*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum series latina. Turnhout, 1953–.
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum. Vienna, 1866–.
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte. Leipzig, 1897–1941; Berlin, 1954–.
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus*. Series latina, ed. J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1841–1880.
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus*. Series graeco-latina, ed. J.-P. Migne. 167 vols. Paris, 1857–64.
Souter	Alexander Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD*. Oxford, 1949.

INTRODUCTION

Among the scholarly achievements of the Venerable Bede (d. 735) his ground-breaking work on the Jewish sanctuaries must rank high.[1] The bulk of it, comprising three massive verse-by-verse commentaries, is quite without parallel in the patristic canon, a virtual exegetical trilogy on the temple in its early historical phases: *De tabernaculo*, in three books, on the account of the tabernacle in Exodus 24:12–30:31; *De templo*, in two books, on the details of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 5:1–7:51; and *In Ezram et Neemiam*, in three books, on Ezra–Nehemiah's account of the post-exilic construction of the second temple.[2] The first two of these commentaries already appear in Liverpool University Press's Translated Texts for Historians series;[3] the third, *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, is offered in the present volume, making the whole trilogy available, finally, to readers in English.

In the larger scheme, this volume adds to the growing list of Bede's exegetical works now available in English translation. To date 11 of the extant 18 commentaries have been translated,[4] but this is only a

1 On Bede's life, see Brown 1987: 1–23 and Ward 1990: 1–18.

2 For the Latin texts, see CCSL 119A, ed. D. Hurst (Turnhout, 1969). The ground-breaking nature of these works is evident from the *Ordinary Gloss*, which derives all of its commentary for Ezra–Nehemiah and the majority of it for the relevant portions of Exodus and 1 Kings from Bede: see *Glossa ordinaria* 1:161–90, 2:96–114, and 2:261–305. On the originality of *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*, see also Holder 1989b: 237; for *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, see below pp. xv, xxii. In addition to these commentaries, Bede composed three homilies on the tabernacle–temple theme: see *Hom.* 2.1, 2.24, and 2.25.

3 *Bede: On the Tabernacle*, trans. A. Holder, TTH 18 (Liverpool, 1994); and *Bede: On the Temple*, trans. S. Connolly, TTH 21 (Liverpool, 1995).

4 These are: *Explanation of the Apocalypse*, *On the Seven Catholic Epistles*, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, *On the Tabernacle*, *On the Temple*, *Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings*, *On Habakkuk*, *On Tobit* (twice), *On Eight Questions*, and *Collectaneum on the Pauline Epistles*; there is also a translation of the fifty *Homilies on the Gospel*: see Bibliography for details. Additionally, Foley and Holder 1999 contains translations of three shorter biblical works, *On the Holy Places*, *On the Resting-Places*, and *On What Isaiah Says*. Translations in progress include *On the Song of Songs* by Arthur Holder, *On Genesis* by Calvin Kendall, and a new translation of *Explanation of the Apocalypse* by Faith Wallis.

recent development, as its chronology attests. Although the first translated commentary appeared as early as 1878, when the Rev. Edward Marshall published an English version of Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypseos*, the next, Dom David Hurst's *Bede the Venerable: On the Seven Catholic Epistles*, did not emerge until 1985 – over a century later![1] Work on other translations has since progressed at an impressive clip, and the developments behind this change of pace are worth pondering. One is an improvement in resources. Despite increasing concern over their accuracy, the critical editions of Bede's commentaries that have been appearing in the Corpus Christianorum since 1960 still represent a step forward, providing scholars a more informed basis to work from than the inadequate nineteenth-century editions of Giles reprinted in Migne's Patrologia Latina.[2] Another development is a shift in scholarly interest, precipitated in part by these improved textual resources. Bede's modern reception has been dominated by his achievements as a historian, his best-known work, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, being a universally acknowledged tour de force of historiographic genius.[3] Without denying this view, more recent scholarship has sought to sketch a fuller picture, one that registers Bede's own claim that scriptural commentary, not history, was his main focus as an author.[4] The objective has been not to diminish the historical works but, in Roger Ray's words,

1 *The Explanation of the Apocalypse by Venerable Beda*, trans. Rev. Edward Marshall (Oxford, 1878); and *Bede the Venerable: Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, trans. D. Hurst, Cistercian Studies Series 82 (Kalamazoo, 1985).

2 Bede's works fill volumes 118–123 of CCSL, which has replaced J. A. Giles, *The Complete Works of the Venerable Bede*, 12 vols. (London, 1843–44), reprinted in vols. 90–95 of the Patrologia Latina. The earlier print history of Bede's works is discussed by Gorman 2001. CCSL now prints all but two of Bede's commentaries, *On Eight Questions* and the *Collectaneum on the Pauline Epistles*, which still lies in manuscript. On the problematic state of the CCSL volumes, see Meyvaert 1976: 44 and Gorman 2002: 256–58. Generally, only two editions are viewed by scholars today as reliable: M. L. W. Laistner's edition of the *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum* (CCSL 121), drawn from his earlier critical edition of that work published by the Medieval Academy of America; and Roger Gryson's edition of the *Explanatio Apocalypseos* (CCSL 121A).

3 The standard text of the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (hereafter *HE*) is that of Colgrave and Mynors 1968, but still useful is Plummer 1896. On Bede's reputation as a historian, see the accounts of Levison 1935; Jones 1946; P. H. Blair 1959; and Campbell 1966.

4 *HE* 5.24 (566): '…I have devoted myself entirely to the study of the Scriptures'. The remark is confirmed by the list of works that follows, which prioritizes the commentaries by listing them first. Both the remark and the list are discussed by Ray 1982: 5–6.

'to recognize that exegesis was the driving force of all of Bede's learning and that strong ties link the commentaries to his other writings'.[1] The appearance of critical editions and translations of the commentaries as well as the increasing number of studies on them all suggest that this recognition has finally taken place.[2]

The study of Bede's exegesis has thus made substantial strides since 1966, when Gerald Bonner, upon delivering the only Jarrow Lecture exclusively on an exegetical topic, felt obliged to declare that he would be 'dealing with an aspect of [Bede's] work which does not, generally, excite much interest'.[3] Today interest not only exists but is growing as scholars uncover a clearer picture of Bede's exegetical programme – its sources and methods, its aims and agendas, and not least its 'strong ties' to his other writings. In all these respects, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* is an especially illustrative text, perhaps the most so of all the commentaries. As the first and only complete exegesis of Ezra–Nehemiah produced in the Middle Ages, it is a purposefully innovative work that proves that Bede's exegetical talents were not limited to mere compilation.[4] With no established *auctores* to follow, Bede had a more demanding task to fulfil, one that foregrounds his ability to use sources eclectically and to develop interpretations of his own making. In the complex multi-levelled exegesis that emerges, several preoccupations become discernible, from the basic need to explicate literal and allegorical meanings to the more personalized agenda of ecclesiastical critique. That agenda is in fact one of the key features of this commentary; it reveals Bede's interest in Ezra-Nehemiah – and in the figure of Ezra specifically – to be anything but disinterested, and in addition helps cast light on the commentary's date, envisaged audience, and relationship to other Bedan texts, not just other commentaries but the historical works too. But Ezra–Nehemiah is a difficult book, its story unfamiliar and its textual history complex, so it is best to come to these

1 Ray 1982: 8. See also Holder 1990 and DeGregorio 2002, 2004, and 2006a.

2 Important recent studies include Ray 1982; Martin 1989; Holder 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1991; Robinson 1994; Meyvaert 1995 and 1997; Gorman 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002; DeGregorio 1999, 2002, 2004, 2005; Kaczynski 2001.

3 Bonner 1966: 1. Cf. Laistner 1939: xi: 'It is obvious that the one work of Bede that will always appeal to a wider circle of readers is his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*… Bede's numerous Biblical commentaries will necessarily be of interest only to a smaller group of students'.

4 For critique of this position, see Ray 1982: 6–12 and 2006; Holder 1990: 403–04 and 1991: 144; Thacker 2006; and DeGregorio 1999: 3–15 and 2006b.

topics later, after we have sketched the biblical background and other essential preliminary matters.

EZRA–NEHEMIAH: CONTENTS AND VERSIONS

The main source for the history of Israel under Persian rule, Ezra–Nehemiah tells the story of the rebuilding of the second temple and the restoration of its cult and community.[1] Though aspects of its chronology are dubious,[2] the narrative divides structurally into three well-defined units, each involving a return from exile and projects of restoration and reform. Ezra 1–6 describes the first return of Jewish exiles to Judah in 538 BC, authorized by Cyrus the Great (559–530 BC) in order to promote the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Led by Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua, the exiles upon arriving erect an altar and lay the temple foundations but in the face of Samaritan opposition do not complete the temple itself until 516 BC, in the sixth year of Darius I (522–486 BC). Ezra 7–10 relates the mission of Ezra, who fifty-eight years later is permitted by Artaxerxes I (465–425 BC) to lead back a second group of exiles. A priest and scribe of God's Law, Ezra returns with the explicit aim of rebuilding the Jewish community in accordance with the teaching of the Torah, witnessed above all in his efforts to reform the people and their leaders from intermarriage with foreigners. Neh. 1–13 forms the third and final section, the events of which take place some thirteen years later either in the reign of the same Artaxerxes or a subsequent ruler of this name. Dismayed that much of Jerusalem still lies in ruin, Nehemiah, cupbearer at the Persian court, is granted royal permission to return to the city to organize the reconstruction of its damaged walls. After overcoming foreign opposition and seeing the project through to completion, he too shifts his attention to problems plaguing the Jewish community, and the story concludes with Nehemiah initiating a series of reforms, targeting unjust taxation, mixed marriages, and lax Sabbath observance.

While the outlines of the story are straightforward enough, the textual forms it has assumed are another matter. In modern English Bibles this narrative is divided into two separate books, entitled 'Ezra'

1 For general accounts of Ezra–Nehemiah and its place in Jewish history, see Wood 1986: 377–406 and Grabbe 1998: 11–68.

2 Williamson 1987: 48–76; Japhet 1994; Grabbe 1992: 88–93.

and 'Nehemiah' (or 'Esdras 1' and 'Esdras 2': see below), but in the ancient canons it formed one book, called 'Ezra–Nehemyah' in the Hebrew Bible and 'Esdras B' in the Septuagint (i.e. the Greek translation of the Old Testament).[1] This account of the story was, moreover, not the only version. The Septuagint also contains a parallel version of later date that bears the designation 'Esdras A'; known only in Greek, it consists of all of Ezra, some verses from Nehemiah, two chapters from 2 Chronicles, and some material original to itself.[2] Based as they were on the Septuagint, the earliest versions of the Latin Bible (called *vetus latina* or 'Old Latin') would accordingly have contained both Esdras A and B in forms identical to the Greek,[3] while the Latin Vulgate of St Jerome (late 4th century) returned to the story's original form by translating just the one-book version as it existed in Hebrew.[4] Indeed, in his prologue to that translation, Jerome acknowledges the existence of two additional books bearing the title Ezra, namely Esdras 3 (= Septuagint's Esdras A, called I Esdras in English Bibles) and Esdras 4 (= II Esdras in English Bibles, a third-century apocryphal work surviving in Latin but originating from Greek sources), but these he swiftly rejects as nothing more than 'dreams' (*somnia*).[5]

Although Bede used Jerome's Vulgate as the basis of *On Ezra and Nehemiah*,[6] it is clear from his own statements, which include references to *vetus translatio*, *alia translatio*, and *alia editio*,[7] that he had his

1 Klein 1992: 732 and Bogaert 2000: 9–13. The spelling 'Esdras' is the Greek form of the Hebrew 'Ezra'.

2 Myers 1974: 1–5 and Grabbe 1998: 69.

3 Bogaert 2000: 7–8. On the Old Latin Bible generally, see Bogaert 1988: 139–56; Kedar 1988: 299–313; and Barrera 1998: 349–53.

4 In modern Vulgate Bibles, however, this material is usually designated as Esdras 1 (= Ezra) and Esdras 2 (= Nehemiah).

5 Jerome *Prologus in libro Ezrae*, 4.11–5.1: 'Neither let it bother anyone that it is a single book that we have published, nor let anyone take delight in the dreams of the apocrypha, which are the third and fourth books. For among the Hebrews as well, the words of Ezra and Nehemiah are contained in one volume, and those things which are not found among them and are not concerned with the twenty-four elders are to be rejected outright'. For additional comment, see Bogaert 2000: 6–9, 15–17 and Myers 1974: 1–5. Since the sixteenth century, Esdras 3 and 4 have been printed in the Vulgate as part of the appendix of Apocrypha at the end of the New Testament.

6 Bede indicates his preference for Jerome's Vulgate in his *Letter to Plegwin* – see *Epist. Pleg.* 7–10 (620.111–622.180).

7 See *In Ezr.* 1.1282; 2.205, 1505, 1759; 3.251, 1350.

eye on other Latin versions of Ezra–Nehemiah too. Bede was of course fortunate to have lived in a monastery whose library was among the greatest in the early medieval West,[1] and it is hardly surprising, especially in the light of Wearmouth–Jarrow's own distinguished achievements in biblical scholarship, that he would have had easy access there to different Latin versions of the Bible. Long ago Max Laistner, in a thorough study of the versions of Acts Bede used in composing his two commentaries on that book, demonstrated just how rich the store of biblical manuscripts Bede had at his disposal was and how varied and flexible his use of it could be.[2] *On Ezra and Nehemiah* confirms this picture, even if some of the details remain blurred.

For the Vulgate, it is clear that Bede consulted more than one manuscript of Ezra–Nehemiah, since at one point he refers to *nostri codices*, 'our copies'.[3] The phrase calls immediately to mind the three complete, single-volume Vulgate Bibles or 'pandects' that were produced at Wearmouth–Jarrow during Bede's own lifetime.[4] In the early Middle Ages, scriptural texts normally circulated as single books or small collections, not all together in one Bible; that the Wearmouth–Jarrow scriptorium had the resources and skill to produce three pandects thus gives some measure of its singularity as a centre of scholarly activity.[5] Only one of these pandects survives intact; known as the 'Codex Amiatinus', it is the oldest and most reliable complete text of the Vulgate in existence today.[6] Additionally, as is well known, the prefatory matter of this codex happens to contain a stunning portrait of Ezra himself – the so-called 'Ezra miniature', which I discuss in Appendix 2. Here we must note that Bede, in composing his commentary, did not rely on Amiatinus's text of

1 See Laistner 1935; Ogilvy 1969; Parkes 1982.

2 Laistner 1937.

3 See *In Ezr*. 3.251–53.

4 The word 'pandect' comes from the Greek, where πανδεκτης means literally 'all-receiver': see Halporn 1980: 292–93, who explains that 'In the Latin of Cassiodorus, the word *pandectes* refers to a one-volume Bible, i.e. a Bible containing the entire text of the OT and NT under one cover'; see also Marsden 1995a: 30. The production of the three pandects at Wearmouth–Jarrow is mentioned by Bede himself in his *History of the Abbots* as well as by the anonymous author of the *Life of Ceolfrith* – see Bede *HA* 15 (379–80) and *Vita Ceolfridi* 20 (395). For comment, see Marsden 1995a: 85–106.

5 On Wearmouth–Jarrow, see the authors cited above in n. 1.

6 See Marsden 1995a: 76–201 and Gorman 2003.

Ezra–Nehemiah directly.[1] This is confirmed by internal disagreement between Bede's text and Amiatinus,[2] as well as by the external fact that Amiatinus, created from the start as a presentation volume for the Pope, had left for Rome with Abbot Ceolfrith in 716, a date, we shall see, that probably falls some years before the commentary's completion.[3] The two remaining pandects, by contrast, did remain at Wearmouth–Jarrow,[4] raising the possibility that Bede's *nostri codices* could refer to them; but like Amiatinus these were massive volumes, hardly the kind he could handle while composing a commentary.[5] In such a context, the phrase is therefore likely to refer, not to the text of Ezra–Nehemiah in the three pandects, but to the smaller, more serviceable manuscripts from which that text was created. Such manuscripts, assuming a variety of forms and covering a range of biblical books, would have come to Wearmouth–Jarrow through the book-buying activities of Benedict Biscop and Abbot Ceolfrith, and once there would among other things have served as the 'working copies' or exemplars that both Bede and the Wearmouth–Jarrow scribes would have relied upon in constructing their texts of the Bible.[6]

From the Old Latin, meanwhile, Bede cites twice from Esdras B and once from Esdras A.[7] For these his source was a different pandect, namely the Codex Grandior. This complete Old Latin Bible, made at Cassiodorus' Vivarium in the sixth century, had by the late seventh

1 Cf. Marsden 1998, who notes in Bede's works 'no more than sixty per cent agreement with Amiatinus'.

2 See esp. *In Ezr*. 3.1480 and the accompanying note.

3 Both Bede and the anonymous author of the *Life of Ceolfrith* inform us that Ceolfrith took Amiatinus with him to Rome: see Bede *HA* 15 (379–80) and *Vita Ceolfridi* 20 (395). An exact date for the three pandects cannot be ascertained. Their completion, however, must fall sometime between 689 and 716, the period of Ceolfrith's abbacy. Accordingly, Marsden 1995a: 106, suggests 'a dating of "before 716"… for Amiatinus and "*c.* 700" for the sister fragments'. On the date of *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, see below, pp. xxxvii–xlii.

4 See Bede *HA* 15 (379–80), which explains that Ceolfrith bequeathed the two sister pandects 'to his monasteries'. Cf. *Vita Ceolfridi* 20 (395).

5 Meyvaert 1995: 354, likewise argues that for his commentaries Bede must have relied not on the pandects but on 'smaller and more manageable biblical manuscripts'.

6 This assumption, which concurs with Marsden 1995a: 103, would account for those instances where Bede's text of Ezra–Nehemiah does overlap with Amiatinus, since both of these, presumably, would have constructed their texts of Ezra–Nehemiah from the same store of manuscripts.

7 For Esdras B, see *In Ezr*. 1.1282 and 3.251–53; for Esdras A, see 2.1759.

century migrated to Wearmouth–Jarrow, as Bede himself informs us.[1] Unfortunately, not only has this codex not survived, but just one complete Old Latin copy of Esdras B exists today, ms. Vercelli, Archivio Capitolare 22, an eleventh-century manuscript of North Italian origin.[2] On two occasions, agreement between this manuscript and the variants cited by Bede confirms his reliance on an Old Latin text of Esdras B.[3] In three separate instances, however, the variants he proposes can be shown to agree neither with Esdras B nor Esdras A.[4] These may represent unrecorded Old Latin variants or perhaps citations Bede found in other writers.[5] Another possibility is they may attest to yet another version of Esdras B that Bede had in his possession. If it is true, as Cassiodorus implies, that the Old Testament text in the Codex Grandior was Jerome's revision from the Septuagint,[6] it is possible that Bede could somehow have possessed two different versions of Esdras B – one of them Old Latin, the other Jerome's revision of it.[7] Of that revision, termed 'hexaplaric' because it was based

1 Bede *HA*, ch. 15 (379–80). The association of Ceolfrith's 'copy of the old translation' – which the abbot is believed to have acquired in Rome and brought to Wearmouth–Jarrow sometime between 678–80 – with Cassiodorus' Codex Grandior was made long ago: see Corssen 1883 and 1891; White 1890: 289–302; more recently, see Bruce-Mitford 1967: 8–9; Meyvaert 1996: 835–9; and Marsden 1995a: 115–17. Bede mentions the Grandior again, in terms suggesting that he had seen it himself, in both *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*: see *De tab*. 2 (81.1557–82.1570) and *De templ*. 2 (192.28–193.52). For an argument that the Grandior never came to Wearmouth–Jarrow and that any knowledge Bede had of the book was derived instead from Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*, see Corsano 1987 and Gorman 2003: 868–72.

2 Fischer 1949: 11, 18; Gryson 1999: 185; Hanhart 1999; Bogaert 2000: 19–21. This manuscript is still unpublished, and I am grateful to Father Pierre Bogaert for his kind assistance in checking its text of Ezra for me.

3 See *In Ezr*. 1.1283 and 3.251–53.

4 See *In Ezr*. 2.205, 2.1505, and 3.1350.

5 Denter 1962: 99. Denter, however, mistakenly concludes in one case that *alia translatio* means 'another explanation': see below *In Ezr*. 1.1282 and the accompanying note.

6 At *Institutiones* I.14.1, 3, Cassiodorus, describing the version of the Old Testament contained in the Codex Grandior, says that 'Jerome left it carefully emended and arranged' (trans. Halporn 137); scholars have taken this as a reference to Jerome's hexaplaric revision: see Fischer 1985: 10–18; Loewe 1969: 115–16; and Marsden 1995a: 104, 131.

7 Before translating the Old Testament into Latin afresh from the Hebrew original, Jerome first attempted to revise the current Old Latin translations of the Old Testament extant in his day, using the Greek text of the Septuagint as his guide: see Sparks 1970: 515, 517–19.

on the Septuagint contained in one of the six columns of Origen's critical edition of the Hebrew Bible known as the 'Hexapla' (Greek *hex*, 'six'), very little has survived, nor do we know how much of the Old Testament it covered;[1] but if Bede did have access to it in the Grandior, it is almost certain that he would have consulted it.[2] It is tempting to conclude that the latter is the *alia translatio*, the 'other translation', that Bede mentions; however, he applies that term to the unrevised Old Latin text of Esdras B as well. Yet in two instances,[3] where Bede's variants are closer to the Greek of the Septuagint than to the Hebrew or Old Latin, the possibility that Jerome's revision of Esdras B, itself based on the Greek, could have been his source should not be too quickly discarded, especially since it is unlikely that Bede would have had a copy of the Septuagint text for that book. Bede's commentary, then, may provide small but unique witness to Jerome's otherwise lost revision of Esdras B.

Finally, Bede's utilization of different versions of Ezra–Nehemiah is valuable in a more general way for the light it throws on his working methods and range as a commentator. *On Ezra and Nehemiah* shares with many of Bede's commentaries a strong interest in the allegorical approach to scriptural interpretation, an approach for which Bede himself is rightly famed.[4] Yet his interests in the biblical text are not, as is sometimes alleged, dominated purely by allegory. Often they involve close attention to the *litterae sensus* and a flair for textual criticism in particular, evidenced above all in his *Retractations* on Acts,[5] but as well by the scrutiny devoted in all his commentaries to grammatical and textual issues. Indeed, the variety of exegetical problems addressed in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, from considering variant

1 For a range of opinions on Jerome's hexaplaric revision, see Semple 1965: 231–34; Sparks 1970: 514–32; Kamesar 1993: 49–58; and Dines 1998: 422.

2 Cf. De Bruyne 1926: 110, who points out that Bede made use of Jerome's hexaplaric revision of the Song of Songs when composing his commentary on this text.

3 See *In Ezr*. 2.205 and 2.1505 and the accompanying notes.

4 De Lubac 2000: 91–93, famously dubbed Bede the first to develop a fully articulated account of Scripture's fourfold sense. See also Holder 1990: 407–11.

5 Bede composed two commentaries on Acts: the *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, a verse-by-verse exegesis completed between 709 and 716; and the *Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum*, a supplement of corrections and further reflections on various textual cruces, published much later, perhaps as late as 731; see Laistner 1939: xi–xvii. Bede's achievements as a textual scholar are discussed by Plummer 1896: liv–lvi; Meyvaert 1976: 47–51; and Marsden 1998: 72–75.

readings to explaining the history and topography to unfolding the allegory, reveal Bede to be a versatile exegete, sensitive to the multi-faceted exigencies of scriptural interpretation.

ON EZRA AND NEHEMIAH: TEXT AND SOURCES

On Ezra and Nehemiah consists of a short prologue followed by three books of roughly equal length, the first two covering Ezra, the last Nehemiah. At 155 pages in the CCSL edition, it is Bede's fifth longest Old Testament commentary, behind *On the Tabernacle*, *On Genesis*, *On the Song of Songs*, and *On Samuel*.[1] As noted, it is also the first complete commentary written on these Old Testament books and the last throughout the entire Middle Ages. Cassiodorus, in the *Institutiones*, mentions a single homily on Ezra by Origen that Bellator, the famous Vivarium translator, had turned from Greek into Latin,[2] but sadly the work has not survived, and it is not known whether the homily belonged to some greater work or whether it represents the extent of Origen's writing on Ezra. It is probable, however, that Origen's homily would have used the text of Esdras A, for modern scholarship has shown that the few citations from the Book of Ezra found in early patristic writings tend to come from Esdras A, not from the canonical account.[3] On the latter, Bede's is our sole piece of commentary.

In choosing to write a complete verse-by-verse exegesis of Ezra–Nehemiah, then, Bede would have no prior tradition of commentary to assimilate, no established *auctores* to follow, as he did, for example, when he wrote *On Genesis* and *On Luke*,[4] among others. Accordingly, the main source to which he had to turn in composing this commentary was the Bible itself. As the source index at the end of this volume records, Bede cites abundantly from both Testaments, quotations from which far outweigh his patristic borrowings. Such dependence on

1 Bede's ten Old Testament commentaries, in order of length, are *On Samuel*, *On the Song of Songs*, *On Genesis*, *On the Tabernacle*, *On Ezra–Nehemiah*, *On the Proverbs of Solomon*, *On the Temple*, *Thirty Questions of Kings*, *On Habakkuk*, and *On Tobit*.

2 Cassiodorus *Institutiones* 1.6.6.

3 Denter 1962: 53–81, 102–03; and Bogaert 2000: 6–7, 19.

4 The prefaces to these works reveal Bede's awareness of the weight of patristic commentary on these biblical books and, in the case of Luke, his reluctance to tread over such well-worn ground: see *In Luc*. Prol. (6.79–10.220) and *In Gen*. Praef. (1.1–2.47).

Scripture, however, is not due solely to a lack of patristic *auctores* on Ezra–Nehemiah. Though a follower of the Fathers, as his favourite tag reminds us,[1] Bede did so as a monk who from an early age learned to read Scripture in a typically monastic way. For the monk, the reading of Scripture is grounded in *lectio divina*, according to which a text is not just read but meditated upon and in this way internalized, digested into the reader's or listener's memory. The goal is to learn scriptural passages – the Psalms above all – *ex corde*, 'by heart', a phrase used by St Benedict and employed by Bede in Book 3 in a passage describing the practice of reading from Scripture during the monastic Office.[2] Such monastic ideas would have been a fundamental part of Bede's experience of learning Scripture, and the impact they had upon his approach to exegesis is evident throughout *On Ezra and Nehemiah*.[3] The opening sentences of Book 1 provide a good example. To illustrate that the temple is a figure of the faithful and that Solomon prefigured Christ, Bede quotes no less than six verses in rapid succession, drawing from both Testaments, each verse adding a further level of explanation.[4] The impression is not one of studied analysis but of cumulative recollection as Bede moves through the various relevant texts stored in his memory. Lawrence Martin too has noted this aspect of Bede's use of the Bible and compared it, I think aptly, to Jean Leclercq's conception of 'an exegesis through reminiscence'.[5] Distinctly monastic in its underpinnings, the phrase in Leclercq's usage presupposes a commentator who 'becomes a sort of living concordance',[6] his mind filled with texts from Scripture that can be recalled and utilized for exegesis.

Of course, in commenting on Ezra–Nehemiah Bede still made use of what patristic materials he could. He cites from several works of

1 The phrase 'following in the footsteps of the Fathers' (*patrum vestigia sequens*) recurs throughout Bede's writings as an all-too-modest description of his authorial role: see, for instance, *In Sam.* Prol. (10.52–54); *In Cant.* Prol. (180.501–4); *Exp. Act. Apost.* Praef. (3.9–10); and *DTR* 5 (287.86). For comment, see DeGregorio 2006a and Ray 2006.

2 *In Ezr.* 3.1325–32. See Ward 1991, for a magisterial discussion of Bede's monastic approach to the Psalter

3 See DeGregorio 2005, for further examples of monasticism's influence on the Ezra commentary.

4 *In Ezr.* 1.1–21.

5 Martin 1989: xxix–xxx; Leclercq 1961: 76–77. In addition, see now DeGregorio 2005: 366–68.

6 Leclercq 1961: 77.

Augustine, particularly his expositions of the Psalms, draws from Gregory the Great's *Homilies on the Gospels*, *Homilies on Ezekiel*, and *Morals on Job*, and selects useful bits from Isidore's *Etymologies*.[1] It is Jerome, however, whom Bede acknowledges as his most formative patristic source. The brief prologue to the text advertises this indebtedness by mentioning Jerome twice in its short compass, first quoting from his Letter 53 and then acknowledging his work on the prophets as 'the greatest help to us'.[2] Jerome commented prolifically on the prophets and throughout *On Ezra and Nehemiah* Bede draws from several different works, particularly Jerome's *On Daniel* and his treatments of various Minor Prophets such as Malachi and Zechariah, whose narratives contain material that intersects with the story told in Ezra–Nehemiah. Moreover, he borrows much from Jerome's *On Hebrew Names*, a source used in all his commentaries, and quotes from Jerome's *Chronicle*, a translation and adaptation of Eusebius of Caesarea's Greek chronicle of world history. To return to the question of monasticism, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* contains several thematic and verbal echoes from the Benedictine Rule and in Book 3 even mentions the saint by name, the only such reference to St Benedict in Bede's exegetical writings.[3] For historical writers, Bede relies above all on the first-century Jewish priest Flavius Josephus, whose sweeping account of ancient Jewish history in the *Antiquities of the Jews* covers many of the same events related in Ezra–Nehemiah.[4] Bede probably knew the *Antiquities* in Latin, not in its original Greek, and some of his citations from this work may even have come to him through such intermediaries as Rufinus or Jerome, as Laistner showed was the case with the *Exposition of Acts*.[5] Finally, Bede cites from a number of works dealing specifically with the topography of the Holy Land, including Adamnan's *On the Holy Places* (which Bede himself had revised in writing his own work on the subject),[6] Jerome's *Book of Places*, and the Pseudo-Eucherian *On the Site of Jerusalem*.

A last point worth noting is Bede's use of himself as a source, evident in the references to and quotations from his earlier writings.

1 For these and the references that follow, see the Index of Sources and Allusions.

2 *In Ezr*. Prol. 17–21.

3 On monasticism's impact on the commentary, see DeGregorio 2005.

4 See Feldman 1992 and 1993.

5 Laistner 1933: 78–79.

6 See CCSL 175: 247–80, for the critical edition of the work. A translation is available in Foley and Holder 1999: 1–25.

In Book 3, for instance, he concludes his discussion of the Seventy Weeks mentioned in the Book of Daniel by directing us to his *The Reckoning of Time*, where, he says, a fuller treatment of the subject may be found. Otherwise he borrows tacitly, as he often does, quoting from his *On the Holy Places* in his discussion of the topography of Jerusalem, and elsewhere importing a chunk of exegesis from his *On the Proverbs of Solomon* to explicate a verse from that book. Such instances not only provide insight into Bede's working methods but can also help us refine the often ambiguous chronology of the commentaries themselves – in the case above, for instance, it is clear that *On the Proverbs of Solomon* is the earlier work, from which Bede has recycled an already formulated interpretation of a verse. In addition to these explicit borrowings and allusions, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* contains numerous thematic and verbal parallels to other commentaries, to the gospel homilies, to the educational treatises, and most tellingly to *The Ecclesiastical History* and *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*, whose critiques of Northumbrian episcopacy are echoed in a handful of striking passages. As noted, these highly critical comments on the state of Northumbrian religious life in Bede's own day are a striking feature of *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, and it must be asked why, of all the commentaries, they should bulk so conspicuously in this one. This is part of a larger question to which we must now turn – namely, what is it that drew this eighth-century Northumbrian exegete to this neglected biblical story, and what is distinctive about his approach to it?

BEDE'S APPROACH TO EZRA–NEHEMIAH

Unlike some of the prologues and prefaces to his commentaries, the short prologue to this work provides little direct insight into what led Bede to compose the work. The admission that he has complied with the wishes of Acca, the abbot-bishop of Hexham to whom many of the commentaries are dedicated,[1] is both familiar and tantalizing, and it is

1 *In Ezr*. Prol. 10–11. Acca was bishop of the Northumbrian see of Hexham from 709 to 731. His role as both sponsor and avid reader of Bede's commentaries is plain from some of the prologues (e.g. *On Genesis*, *On Acts*, and *On Luke*); in return, to Acca Bede dedicated *On Genesis*, *On Acts*, *On Samuel*, *On the Temple*, and *On Luke*, whose preface contains Acca's only extant piece of writing – a letter he sent to Bede urging him to get on with the work in spite of his reluctance to comment on a gospel already masterfully treated by St Ambrose: see *In Luc*. Prol. (CCSL 120:5.1–6.78). On Acca's life and achievements, see Bede's glowing account at *HE* 5.20 (530–32).

regrettable that the nature of Acca's involvement is not specified further.[1] On the subject of Bede's approach to Ezra–Nehemiah and the influence Jerome had on it, we are much better informed. The Prologue opens with a quote from Jerome's Letter 53 stating that Ezra–Nehemiah consists of a single book whose narrative displays one thing *in cortice* and conceals another *in medulla*.[2] Following Jerome's metaphor, Bede states that he intends in what follows '…to discover, when the bark of the letter (*cortice litterae*) is peeled back, something higher and more sacred in the marrow of the spiritual sense (*in medulla sensus spiritalis*)'[3] – a clear and early signal to the reader that his approach to Ezra–Nehemiah will be allegorical. To be sure, the 'bark' or literal sense of these books did have a special appeal for Bede, as we shall see. His main focus, however, was their 'marrow' or spiritual sense, called also the allegorical, mystical or figurative sense, which is 'higher and more sacred' because it resides, properly speaking, not 'in the text, but in the realities of which the text speaks'.[4] Accordingly, Bede explains that the story told in Ezra–Nehemiah will concern '…the Lord Himself and His temple and city, which we are',[5] and in the final sentence of the prologue he again credits Jerome, this time for his work on the prophets 'who themselves had foretold that the same events which Ezra and Nehemiah wrote about would be carried out under the figure of Christ and the Church'.[6]

Of course, the notion that the Old Testament should be read for its spiritual meaning was a fundamental precept of the allegorical method of scriptural interpretation practised by the Fathers – a method in which Bede himself was thoroughly schooled.[7] I doubt that he needed

1 One can, however, rule out Acca's requesting – as he did in the cases of Genesis and Luke's gospel – a commentary that would simplify the recondite prose of earlier exegetes, for Bede was the first to treat Ezra–Nehemiah. Possibly Acca had specific questions about these books that he wanted Bede to address, as is the case with the two exegetical letters entitled *On the Resting-Places* and *On What Isaiah Says*, which Bede sent to Acca in response to specific points of biblical interpretation the bishop found puzzling and asked him to elucidate. These are translated in Foley and Holder 1999: 27–51.

2 *In Ezr*. Prol. 9.

3 *In Ezr*. Prol. 13–15.

4 de Lubac 2000: 2.86.

5 *In Ezr*. Prol. 15–16.

6 *In Ezr*. Prol. 17–21.

7 See Jones 1969–70: 131–60; and Holder 1990.

Jerome to tell him to approach Ezra–Nehemiah accordingly.[1] But these early deferrals to this 'famous translator and teacher of Holy Scripture'[2] were essential to the question of Bede's own self-presentation: lacking an existing tradition of patristic commentary to depart from, he could in a sense use Jerome to create one, proof that he was following the Fathers' footsteps instead of his own.[3] Nevertheless, Jerome's brief remarks on Ezra–Nehemiah in no way amounted to a complete allegorical reading, something that Bede would have to work out for himself. To a large extent Ezra–Nehemiah's concern with the temple, whose symbolism was discussed in the New Testament and had been enlarged on by the Fathers,[4] provided a ready framework for reading the story, and indeed this is where Book 1 of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* begins. From Bede's opening comments on the figurative meanings of the word 'temple' in general and of Solomon's temple in particular, it might appear at this early stage that his overall purpose in *On Ezra and Nehemiah* would thus dovetail with that of the tabernacle and temple commentaries, which offer extended and detailed allegorical analyses of their respective structures. To be sure, the three commentaries do share many methodological, stylistic and thematic parallels, perhaps none more conspicuous than their viewing the temple as a multivalent symbol capable of designating simultaneous levels of understanding.[5] But for all the similarities they exhibit that allow us to view them as a group, and while it is not unreasonable to imagine that Bede conceived them as such, their uniformity should not be pushed too far. For *On Ezra and Nehemiah* is in many ways a unique work, both in its subject matter and Bede's approach to it.

It is essential to remember that Ezra–Nehemiah chronicles a later period of temple history, centred on the events surrounding the rebuilding of the second temple, the first one (i.e. Solomon's temple)

1 Cf. Mayr-Harting 1976: 19, who is certainly correct in pointing out that *On Ezra and Nehemiah* '…probably does not depend on Jerome as heavily as the preface implies'.

2 *In Ezr*. Prol. 1.

3 On this point, see DeGregorio 2006b.

4 On the New Testament and patristic roots of the temple topos, see Holder 1989b and O'Reilly 1995: xvii–xxviii.

5 In his rhetorical manual *On Schemes and Tropes*, written as an aid to scriptural interpretation, Bede discusses this theory of understanding, using the temple as his example: see *De schem. et trop*. 2.12 (168.265–169.269, 273–79). The passage is quoted below, p. 97, n. 1.

having been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. In substance this account of the temple's subsequent restoration presented Bede with markedly different material to comment upon from what he would encounter in *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*. For whereas the selected portions of Exodus and 1 Kings covered in those commentaries discuss the physical construction of the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomon's temple, very little of Ezra–Nehemiah deals with the second temple's material architecture, perhaps because it was an exact replica of the temple built by Solomon.[1] Instead, these books depict a more comprehensive action, an unfolding narrative of which the temple's reconstruction is only a small though admittedly focal part.[2] Their real subject is the reconstruction of the Jewish people, who after years in captivity are allowed to return to the Promised Land to re-establish themselves as a community by restoring proper cultic and civic relations with God.[3]

That Bede saw this Old Testament narrative as something different from the lists and descriptions of architectural details he analysed in *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple* is evident first of all from the allegory. Whereas the latter commentaries associate their respective buildings primarily with the Church as an earthly and heavenly reality,[4] *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, though it treats these themes too, develops a further line of interpretation derived from Ezra–Nehemiah's larger plot. Here, the narrative's controlling images of exile and return, of destruction and construction, of loss and recovery are read by Bede as symbols not of the Church *per se*, but of a particular spiritual condition experienced by its members – namely, the condition of being separated from the community of the Church through sin and returning to it through repentance. As he explains at the start of Book 1, summing up his purpose in the work as a whole:

> It is appropriate, then, that those who were held as captives in Babylonia as a result of wicked works are freed after seventy years, and that they

1 This, at any rate, is Bede's view: see *In Ezr*. 2.206–38 and the accompanying notes.

2 Only a handful of verses in Ezra's ten chapters describe the temple itself or depict scenes of building: see Ezra 3:8–10 and 6:3–4, 14.

3 Wood 1970: 396; Williamson 1987: 79.

4 See esp. *De tab*. 2 (42.1–43.69) and *De templ*. 1 (147.1–148.53).

> rebuild God's house and the holy city. For often those who were separated because of their sins from the communion and society of the Holy Church and joined to the fate and number of infidels, in turn through the gift of the Holy Spirit exercise themselves zealously in the pursuit of good works and in this way regain the fellowship of the faithful, i.e. the Lord's house and city from which they were cast out. For it should be noted that the rebuilding of the Lord's house after it was burnt down, the restoration of Jerusalem after its destruction, the return of the people to their homeland after their captivity, and the recovery of the stolen holy vessels to their house all typologically denote this one and the same return of penitents to the Church. But since the prophet Ezra sufficiently explains how all these things came to pass, I want to relate some episodes from this book and, so far as the Lord will grant, to expound them according to the spiritual sense so that it may be more clearly disclosed how those who have perished due to negligence and error should be brought back to repentance, by how much grace of God and by how much effort of their own pardon ought to be sought and procured for the sins they have committed, and how these same penitents together with those who have recently come to the faith should build one and the same house of Christ and together look forward to the ceremonies of its dedication in the future.[1]

From two key passages in Books 2 and 3,[2] we learn that this concern with the 'spiritual rebuilding' of repentance is for Bede the primary allegorical distinction between the first and second temples. In his view, while both buildings could signify Christ's physical body as well as the Church collectively or the elect individually,[3] at the same time the disparities surrounding their construction denote two different aspects of Christian experience: if Solomon's temple, insofar as it was built rapidly during a time of peace, signifies the ease of initial conversion to the faith, then the prolonged and arduous labour that characterized the temple's later restoration is synonymous with 'the great effort' necessary to atone for sins committed after baptism, which can be forgiven, writes Bede, only 'through the long labour of penance, copious streams of tears, and the unremitting

1 *In Ezr*. Prol. 68–88.
2 *In Ezr*. 2.689–707 and 3.787–99; see also *In Ezr*. 1.1557–91.
3 See *In Ezr*. 2.487–96; cf. *De templ*. 1 (147.7–33).

toil of continence'.[1]

Compelling though such allegorical differences are, the spiritual meanings that Bede draws from the Ezra–Nehemiah story are not the most noteworthy index of the material's distinctiveness. This belongs to the literal narrative itself, which Bede recognized had a unique connection to his own contemporary world. In some sense, of course, the entire history of Israel was in Bede's view replete with significance for the present, for as scholars have shown he purposefully interpreted his people's past in Old Testament terms: the English were a new 'chosen people' who like ancient Israel had a divine destiny to fulfil.[2] Accordingly, his exegesis of the Old Testament played no small role in shaping the way he narrates that story in *The Ecclesiastical History*, his treatment of I Samuel, for example, influencing his view of Anglo-Saxon kingship,[3] and his discussion of the Universal Church under the tabernacle–temple metaphor underpinning much of what he had to say about the historical church of the *gens Anglorum*.[4] In *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, it is similarly possible to detect a number of links to *The Ecclesiastical History* – both recount journeys by a chosen people to lands of promise where they are to build up the house of God; both tie the success of the ventures to the patronage of righteous kings; both describe the troubles posed not only by the local inhabitants (i.e. the Samaritans and the British) but by the elect's own sinfulness; and both emphasize the key role played not only by divine grace but by the hard work of teachers dedicated to spreading the faith and fending off heresy. But with respect to its topical relevance there is yet another aspect to *On Ezra and Nehemiah* that lends it a special resonance – namely, that the story it treats is quite literally *a narrative about religious reform*, a topic known to have been of vital interest to Bede.

1 *In Ezr*. 2.702–04. In one of his homilies on the temple theme, Bede puts the contrast somewhat differently, comparing the temple's destruction and restoration to 'the various events that happen to the Church: at one time she is overwhelmed by the persecution of unbelievers; at another she is freed from persecutions and serves her Lord peacefully; at another she is endangered in certain of her members by the snares of the ancient enemy; at another because of the meticulous concern of faithful teachers, she recovers those whom for a while she seemed to have lost, chastised by repentance' – see *Hom*. 2.24 (364.234–365.275); trans. Martin and Hurst 2:250.

2 Jones 1969–70; Wormald 1992; Thacker 1983.

3 McClure 1983.

4 Mayr-Harting 1976: 19–22; O'Reilly 1995: xxxiii–li.

Quite apart from their allegorical significance, then, these biblical books would have had a tremendous pull on his imagination.

In a pivotal 1983 article, Alan Thacker established the centrality of reform as a theme in Bede's later writings; drawing mainly on the prose *Life of St Cuthbert* (c. 721) and *The Ecclesiastical History* (c. 731), he illustrated their potent concern with 'a general reform in church and society, the instruments of which were to be an instructed king and aristocracy, a rejuvenated episcopate and, above all, a reformed monasticism'.[1] As a Christian author, Bede no doubt saw these ideas as having application throughout Christendom as a whole, but it is no less certain that their immediate field of play was to be closer to home. In *The Ecclesiastical History*, for instance, he memorably contrasted Bishop Aidan's pastoral zeal with 'our modern slothfulness',[2] thereby signalling not only that his 'gallery of good examples'[3] was meant to provide 'a collection of models of right living and teaching which demonstrated the way reform could be achieved',[4] but also that he was speaking primarily about the slothfulness of his fellow Northumbrians. The persistence of that slothfulness in Northumbrian institutions in turn prompted his most expressly reformist and latest extant work, the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht* (734), which took a different approach to the subject.[5] Instead of evoking a past golden age for present emulation, as he did in the prose *Life of St Cuthbert* and *The Ecclesiastical History*, in the *Letter* he telescoped the current demise, first tracing its cause to an episcopate corrupted by avarice and a monasticism diluted by secularization, and then proposing a very specific list of solutions – better-trained teachers, a greater supply of priests ordained to administer the sacraments, an episcopate dedicated to preaching by example as well as by word, the creation of more bishoprics as Pope Gregory had originally envisaged, and the confiscation and reform of monasteries that had abandoned the high ascetic and pastoral standards set by the earlier generation.[6]

1 Thacker 1983: 149.

2 *HE* 3.5 (226).

3 Campbell 1966: 182.

4 Thacker 1983: 142.

5 At *Epist. Ecg*. 17 (423), Bede gives the date of the *Letter* as 5 November 734; he died six months later on 26 May 735. The Latin text is printed in Plummer 1896: 405–23. For critical discussion of the *Letter*, see Brown 1987: 79–80 and DeGregorio 2004: 6–9.

6 See *Epist. Ecg*. 2 (406), 5 (408–09), 9 (412–13), 10–12 (413–17).

Naturally, such weighty preoccupations with reform left a mark on Bede's commentaries too, visible in their manifestly pastoral orientation, but also in occasional references to the slothfulness of present times or the maleficent habits of bad teachers.[1] Yet they surface with exceptional vividness in *On Ezra and Nehemiah* because of the biblical story's own decided engagement with reform, which time and again mirrors and merges with Bede's own reforming agenda, as I have demonstrated elsewhere.[2] The appositeness of scriptural past to Northumbrian present as Bede perceived it is registered most perceptibly through a series of unique parallels between *On Ezra and Nehemiah* and the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*.[3] A cogent example is provided by his comments on Neh. 5:1–4. Here, the unjust tax imposed on some poor Jews by their wealthier brethren provides the perfect occasion for Bede to condemn the tendency of men of religion in his own day to 'exact an immense tax and weight of worldly goods from those whom they claim to be in charge of while giving nothing for their eternal salvation either by teaching them or by providing them with examples of good living or by devoting effort to works of piety for them'.[4] This statement matches his criticism in the *Letter* of an episcopal tribute that Northumbrian bishops had been imposing on the populace in return for pastoral care which, according to Bede, was rarely if ever rendered.[5] In its treatment of analogous abuses, the biblical narrative thus naturally intersects with Bede's own distinctive interests as a promoter of reform witnessed in both commentary and letter. There is no need for allegory here since Nehemiah's zeal to reform the economic mistreatment of his people is itself the message, as Bede's startling plea that 'some Nehemiah… might come in our own days'[6] makes clear. That other parts of Ezra–Nehemiah were equally paradigmatic for voicing his ideas on reform is evident from countless analogous remarks made throughout the exegesis, as when he equates

1 E.g. *De tab*. 3 (96.136–43 and 115.869–75); *De templ*. 2 (206.595–207.603); *In Reg*. 30 (320.1–321.32); *In Sam*. 2 (122.2254–60). For a full account of reform in Bede's commentaries, see DeGregorio 2002.

2 See DeGregorio 2004 for a fuller account of the argument that follows.

3 E.g. *In Ezr*. 1.282–89, 1458–70; 2.597–604, 619–26, 1474–79; 3.66–74, 820–37, 887–99, 1866–74. For detailed comment, see the notes accompanying these passages.

4 *In Ezr*. 3.830–33. Cf. *In Ezr*. 3.887–99 and 1863–74 for similar allusions.

5 *Epist. Ecg*. 7–9 (410–12). See Blair 2005: 155–56, for further comment.

6 *In Ezr*. 3.834–35; on the importance of the episode's literal sense, cf. *In Ezr*. 3.859–65.

the giving of material goods to the departing exiles with the proper distribution of wealth to support the needs of preachers, or when he uses the Persian kings' support of the temple to discuss the need for Christian kings to use their power to protect the Church, or when he associates the appointing of Levites to serve in the temple with the duty of bishops to appoint teachers to preach to the faithful – all themes at the core of the *Letter*.[1]

The most salient intersection of past and present reform is seen, however, in Bede's approach to the figure of Ezra. That he was of special interest to Bede and the Wearmouth–Jarrow community is evident not only from Bede's commentary but also from the 'Ezra miniature' in the Codex Amiatinus.[2] The symbolic potential that this Old Testament priest and scribe offered that community was no doubt manifold. Yet, as modern biblical scholars hasten to point out,[3] Ezra's main role in the canonical story is principally that of a religious reformer: he journeys from Babylon to Jerusalem with the sacred vessels and a group of priests and Levites to implement proper cultic worship in the rebuilt temple, dissolves the mixed marriages and exacts repentance from the parties involved, and instructs the repatriated Jewish community through his public reading of the Law (see Ezra 7–10, Neh. 8). Insofar as Ezra thereby leads his people from sin in Babylon to salvation in Jerusalem, he is for Bede a figure of Christ the heavenly Priest and Scribe who, journeying into the sin of this world by becoming incarnate, leads humankind from earthly tribulation to the peace of the celestial Jerusalem.[4] But at the same time Bede, himself eager to promote reform, develops a more topical and personalized interpretation of Ezra's priestly and scribal activities clearly meant to underline their reforming value for the present.[5] Regarding Ezra's designation as 'a scribe swift in the Law of Moses' (Ezra 7:6), he accordingly stresses that Ezra is both a model teacher and an industrious textual scholar – like Bede himself! – who single-handedly

1 See, respectively, *In Ezr.* 1.611–21, 2.263–67, and 1.1446–70. Other reform-related themes include corrupt monasteries (*In Ezr.* 2.600–04); slothful teachers (*In Ezr.* 3.66–79); teaching by example (*In Ezr.* 2.1109–16, 1358–67, 1415–24; 3.1091–95, 1145–51). See DeGregorio 2004, for a full treatment of these themes.

2 On the miniature's significance and relation to the commentary, see Appendix 2.

3 Wood 1970: 79; Grabbe 1994.

4 On Ezra as a type of Christ, see esp. *In Ezr.* 2.858–912, 1957–97.

5 See DeGregorio 2004, for a fuller discussion of these matters.

restored the canon of Scripture destroyed in the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem.[1] A key passage in Book 2 connects those endeavours with the spiritual reform of the returning exiles:

> But because when the temple had been burned down and the city of Jerusalem had been demolished, the holy writings kept there were likewise burnt through enemy devastation, it was proper that, when the Lord showed mercy and returned to his people, these writings should also be restored, so that having repaired the buildings that had been destroyed they would also have writings from which they would receive encouragement and learn *how they might be inwardly restored* in faith and love of their Creator (my emphasis).[2]

The reform theme is then picked up and intensified in Bede's treatment of Ezra as priest. Critical here is the introduction of the term *pontifex* or 'high priest', a term not applied to Ezra in the canonical story.[3] Yet Bede's use of the word is deliberate, though his purpose is not, I would argue, to designate Ezra as the hereditary high priest, since in the biblical story that role is clearly assigned to others, as Bede himself acknowledges.[4] Instead, his handling of the term appears designed to underline Ezra's status as a figure of pre-eminent religious authority whose reforming actions are programmatic for ecclesiastics in Bede's own time. The most striking examples of this contemporizing strategy come from Book 2 of the commentary, where the term repeatedly appears in conjunction with Ezra's purging the exiles of their foreign wives and serves in that context to emphasize his role in leading both people and priesthood to repentance and reform.[5] It is here that we encounter Bede's revealing definition of the term, *pontifex, id est archiepiscopus* ('high priest, i.e. an archbishop'),[6] an equation that makes clear the extent to which in his mind Ezra was to be a model for contemporary ecclesiastical rulers. In the light of the troubled situation outlined in the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*, the local,

1 On this see *In Ezr*. 2.791–821 and the accompanying notes.

2 *In Ezr*. 2.772–78.

3 For reference to Ezra as *pontifex*, see *In Ezr*. 2.890, 1587, 1627, 1708, 1821, 1950; and 3.1078, 1134.

4 See, for example, *In Ezr*. 2.1743–44.

5 See the citations in n. 3 above.

6 *In Ezr*. 2.1587.

reformist implications of this merger of pontifical and episcopal roles are inescapable: it is incumbent upon bishops such as Ecgberht, so Bede implies, to follow the example of Ezra the *pontifex* by using their authority and zeal to set straight wayward priests and laymen and thereby lead society to reform, just as the *Letter* demanded.

In Bede's presentation of Ezra as scholar, priest, and religious reformer, then, as well as in his development of the other reform-related themes noted above, I suggest we have at least a partial answer to our question of what it was that drew him to comment on these neglected Old Testament books. Recognizing their power as an exemplum of repentance and reform at both the individual and societal levels, he was keen to appropriate them as a guide of sorts for dealing with the pastoral and secular crises declaimed in the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*. The pastoral and scholarly endeavours of Ezra, the upright leadership of Nehemiah, the high standards of priestly purity and ministry implemented in the restored temple – here, Bede was quick to perceive, were models from the biblical past for what needed to take place in eighth-century Northumbria if Church and folk were to be saved from spiritual degeneration. Indeed, we might go further and say that, in the figure of Ezra himself, at once scholar, priest, and reformer, Bede found a ready image in terms of which to fashion his own authorial persona and frame his Ezra-like mission to foster the regeneration of his people.[1] While doubtless not the sole purpose behind *On Ezra and Nehemiah*'s composition, such reformist strains illustrate the degree to which exegesis for Bede could grow out of, and respond to, the same matrix of social, political, and religious concerns that prompted him to write the prose *Life of St Cuthbert*, *The Ecclesiastical History*, and above all the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*. These aspects of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* make it one of the Jarrow monk's most innovative creations, proof of the range his exegetical abilities could take no less than of the cultural work he believed the genre of biblical commentary itself could effectively accommodate. A careful reading of this commentary can therefore add much to the growing sense among scholars today that, as an exegete, Bede was far more than a compiler or popularizer who merely followed in the footsteps of those who went before. On the contrary, his devotion to the Fathers who preceded him did not, it is clear, prevent him from moving

1 On the notion of Bede as a 'Northumbrian Ezra', cf. DeGregorio 2004: 16–18.

in directions of his own making – or rather, from leaving footprints of his own – relative to the needs of the immediate Northumbrian world in which he lived.

AUDIENCE AND DATE

If, as the foregoing suggests, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* was written in part to promote the reform of the Northumbrian church, can this tell us something about the work's original audience and date of composition? In my view, expressed more fully elsewhere,[1] the commentary's reform content does have a bearing on these issues, so it has been necessary to reserve discussion of them for last.

Let us begin with the question of audience. It is readily apparent that Bede composed *On Ezra and Nehemiah* with different levels of readership in mind. First, in putting together a complete commentary on Ezra–Nehemiah, Bede was breaking new ground and accordingly must have sensed that he was producing a work that would appeal to a wide international audience, comprising professional exegetes and churchmen throughout Christendom for whom the text would have filled a gap in the patristic canon.[2] Some measure of this level of reception is attested by the evidence of the *Ordinary Gloss*, the standard medieval commentary on the Bible compiled in the early twelfth century, which relies solely on Bede for its exegetical glosses on Ezra–Nehemiah.[3] Secondly, like all the commentaries, undoubtedly *On Ezra and Nehemiah* was written for those whom Bede calls the *praedicatores* and *doctores* – that is, the preachers and teachers of his own day whose charge it was in turn to instruct the faithful. Much has been written about this local Northumbrian context of reception,[4] a common view being that Bede, aware he was addressing priests and monks who lacked his grasp of Latin and theology, strove in his commentaries to produce 'simple, accurate digests of the orthodox teaching… aimed merely to help the intellec-

1 See DeGregorio 2004, for a more expansive treatment of what follows.

2 On the international reception of the commentaries, see Ray 1982: 10–11; Cross 1996; Ward 1990: 80; and Hill 1998 and 2006; on Bede's attempt to supplement the Fathers, see Brown 1987: 42–43.

3 See above, p. xiii, n. 2.

4 Bonner 1970 and 1999; Eckenrode 1981; Thacker 1983 and 1992; McClure 1985; Foot 1989: 46–48; Ward 1990: 78–84; and DeGregorio 1999, 2002, and 2004.

tually slothful English'.[1] Certainly the treatment devoted in *On Ezra and Nehemiah* to such fundamental topics as the Church, the sacraments, the Trinity, sin and virtue, and heresy fits with Bede's attempt to instruct his novice readers, as does his revealing comment in Book 2, where he acknowledges the need to restate his exegesis of a verse to make the meaning 'accessible to the less learned as well'.[2] And yet, in this one commentary at least, the evidence suggests that this could not have been his only contemporary audience or objective, for the work's reform content points to a third level of readership that evidently had little to do with instructing the *rudis lector* ('uneducated reader'). Indeed, by raising in *On Ezra and Nehemiah* the very same body of concerns formulated in the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*, Bede, just as in that work, was ostensibly launching an appeal not to those who were beginners in the faith, but instead to a seasoned body of monastic readers which would have included those in the highest positions of power, bishops such as Acca and Ecgberht who, he clearly hoped, would use their episcopal standing to redress the situation.[3] Only in the light of some such conclusion, which aligns well with Alan Thacker's idea that Bede was writing primarily for 'an intellectual and moral elite',[4] do many of the heavily reformist passages in the commentary make sense, passages that reveal to us a Bede deeply immersed in the local church politics of his day. That Bede we tend to associate with his historical writings, but *On Ezra and Nehemiah* proves that such activism permeated his exegetical work as well.

On Ezra and Nehemiah's date, by contrast, is more problematic. Here alone among Bede's commentaries, the problem is not a lack of information, but contradictions among the information we have. On the one hand, there is Bede's reference in Book 3 to *The Reckoning of Time*, completed in 725, a date that would put *On Ezra and Nehemiah* with Bede's later commentaries.[5] On the other hand, there is Bede's declaration in the preface to *On Genesis* that he intends to

1 Carroll 1946: 250. See also Jenkins 1935: 170–71; Bonner 1973: 73; McClure 1985: 17–19. For Bede's own remarks on the challenge of instructing his untaught countrymen, see especially the prefaces to his *Explanation of the Apocalypse* and *On Genesis – Exp. Apoc.* (233.140–46) and *In Gen.* praef. (1.18–29).

2 See *In Ezr.* 2.891–93.

3 See DeGregorio 2004: 23–24.

4 Thacker 1983: 131.

5 See *In Ezr.* 3.155–57. On the date of *The Reckoning of Time*, see Jones 1977: 241.

postpone his exegesis of the rest of the Genesis story until he has finished examining 'the book of the holy prophet and priest Ezra'.[1] Bede's *On Genesis* appears to have been produced in stages, the latest running up to 725, but the preface is believed to be earlier and has been assigned, rather arbitrarily, to the period 709–711.[2] Accordingly, Bede's remarks there appear to indicate an early date for *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, before the year 725 suggested by the mention of *The Reckoning of Time* in Book 3. We must ask, therefore, whether other evidence exists to reconcile these contrary datings.

The case for an early date has been marshalled exclusively by Paul Meyvaert. In a 1997 article, he claimed that *On Ezra and Nehemiah* was composed in two discrete stages, the first predating 720 and comprising Books 1 and 2, the second postdating 725 and consisting of Book 3 alone.[3] In a more recent discussion, he has suggested that we delete the reference to *The Reckoning of Time* from Book 3 on the grounds that it is no more than a 'marginal note [that] became absorbed into the main text'.[4] Taking the preface to *On Genesis* as the key, he locates the composition of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* between the years 711–715.[5]

1 *In Gen.* praef. (2.33–45): 'And I have carried through the work up to the point where Adam, having been ejected from the paradise of pleasure, entered the exile of the temporal life. I intend to write some things also about subsequent events of the sacred narrative, God willing, with the accompanying help of your intercession, after I have first examined for a while (*parum perscrutatus fuero*) the book of the holy prophet and priest Ezra in which, both as a prophet and as a historian, he wrote about the sacred meanings of Christ and the Church under the allegorical figure of the release from the long captivity, of the restoration of the temple, of the rebuilding of the city, of the return to Jerusalem of the vessels which had been taken away, of the rewriting of the Law of God which had been burned, of the purification of the people from their foreign wives, and of the people's conversion with one heart and soul to the service of God, and after with God's help, I have made some of these sacred meanings which I have mentioned clearer to those who are desirous of learning.'

2 On the various compositional stages of *On Genesis*, see Jones 1967: vi–x, and Gorman 1996: 303–07. The dating of the preface to the period 709–711, as Meyvaert 2005: 1095, most recently assumes, is based on pure conjecture, as is the idea that Bede's comments on Gen. 1:1–2:3, labelled '1a' by Jones (see Jones 1967: vii), ever made up a separate recension that was issued by Bede at a very early date: see Gorman 1996: 303. The fact is that we simply do not have conclusive evidence for dating either the preface or Book 1a to the precise early dates usually ascribed to them.

3 Meyvaert 1997.

4 Meyvaert 2005: 1093.

5 Meyvaert 2005: 1096. This article appeared soon after an article of mine in the same journal, in which I question Meyvaert's 1997 arguments for an early date: see next note.

But such arguments are less than compelling. For example, it is manifestly untrue, as we have seen, that 'we do not find the appellation *pontifex* in the *Commentary on Ezra*', a key assertion in Meyvaert's argument that the commentary was composed in discrete early and late stages.[1] There is no need to segment the individual books of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* into different chronological layers, for it is clear that it is a uniformly coherent work, as a reading of the *capitula* or 'chapter headings' at its beginning amply shows. Moreover, Meyvaert offers no evidence of any kind to support his theory that the reference to *The Reckoning of Time* began as a marginal gloss; he would simply erase the comment from Bede's text.[2] This leaves Bede's

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As my remarks in the next paragraph indicate, I do not accept his more recent claims concerning 1) Bede's reference to *The Reckoning of Time* in Book 3 of *On Ezra and Nehemiah*; or 2) Bede's remarks in the Genesis preface. His conclusions regarding the phrase *hostili clade perustae* in the commentary and the couplet atop the Ezra miniature are discussed in Appendix 2.

1 See Meyvaert 1997: 285, where he claims that the supposed absence of the term *pontifex* from *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 'was due probably to a revision Bede made to his earlier work, namely in the commentary as it existed in its first stage'. DeGregorio 2004: 21–23, offers a critique of this argument. In his 2005 article Meyvaert retracts this theory about successive revisions (see p. 1091).

2 See Meyvaert 2005: 1093. Meyvaert's claim that the comment is a marginal gloss is preceded by a comparison of *In Ezr.* 3.132–57 (which ends with that comment) and *DTR* 9, both of which treat the so-called 'seventy prophetic weeks' mentioned in the Book of Daniel. He believes the comparison reveals *On Ezra and Nehemiah* to be the earlier work 1) because there, he alleges, Bede follows Julius Africanus' calculation of the seventy prophetic weeks (instead of Eusebius', whom Meyvaert thinks Bede prefers in *DTR* 9); and 2) because Bede quotes the Old Latin version of Daniel 9:25, while in *DTR 9* he quotes the Vulgate version of the same verse 'as was his custom in later works' (1093). But these are highly dubious assertions. The discrepancy at the end of *DTR* 9 concerns, not the seventy prophetic weeks, but the year of Tiberius' reign in which Christ's Passion took place: Africanus puts it at Tiberius 15 (following the Synoptic Gospels) and Eusebius puts in at year 18 (following the Gospel of John). But this has no bearing whatsoever on how the seventy prophetic weeks themselves are calculated. For this, Bede *always* follows Africanus. Accordingly, Jerome and Africanus are paired as authorities on the chronology of the seventy prophetic weeks in *DTR* 66 (under AM 3529), while Eusebius is followed on the regnal year of the Passion (at AM 3984). Moreover, we should expect *DTR* 9 to treat the topic of the seventy prophetic weeks in a more lengthy and detailed manner than a few sentences in a biblical commentary, since Bede's objectives in the two works are different. Regarding Bede's preference for the Vulgate over the Old Latin in his later works, suffice it to note that *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*, two works known to date from later in Bede's career, cite abundantly from the Old Latin. As grounds for dating *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, then, neither of these claims has merit.

remarks in the preface to *On Genesis*. It is certainly possible that his postponement of *On Genesis* came as a result of the work taking place at that time on the Codex Amiatinus, for there can be no doubt that he was heavily involved in the project.[1] But this need not mean, as Meyvaert insists, that he completed *On Ezra and Nehemiah* at that time too. For one thing, firm evidence for dating the Genesis preface to the period Meyvaert assigns to it (i.e. 709–711) is lacking.[2] Furthermore, the wording of the preface itself is also less certain than may seem: it says nothing about *finishing* a commentary on Ezra, but describes rather Bede's desire to 'examine for a while' (*parum perscrutatus fuero*) the Ezra story, and to 'explain… some of its sacred meanings' (*aliqua ex his… sacramentis… reddidero*).[3] That this desire should be equated with *completing* the full three-book commentary by the early date of 715 may therefore be doubted; indeed, the preface says nothing at all of the events of Nehemiah, which constitutes the commentary's third book. Accordingly, Bede's words could just as well refer to some preliminary and less extensive stage of research he conducted into the Ezra story while Amiatinus's text and decorative materials were being prepared.[4] The Ezra miniature itself, we know, must have been completed by 716, the year the pandect left Wearmouth–Jarrow for Rome.[5] Hence Meyvaert, keen to see the miniature and commentary as contemporaneous 'companion pieces', would place the completion of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* just before that date, between 711 and 715 – just prior, he makes a point of noting, to Bede's commencing work on his commentary on Samuel.[6] But this conclusion ignores a key piece of evidence: namely, that in the preface to *On Samuel* Bede is forthright in telling us about his recently completed work: he states that he has just finished commenting on

1 See Marsden 1998.

2 See above, p. xxxviii, n. 2.

3 See *In Gen*. praef. (2.35–45). Meyvaert's renderings of these key portions of the preface are inaccurate: he translates *parum perscrutatus fuero* as 'I would like to discourse somewhat', and *et aliqua ex his quae commemoraui sacramentis apertiora studiosis, Deo favente, reddidero* as 'My desire is to explain the sacraments I have just briefly mentioned in a fuller way for the benefit of studious readers' (see Meyvaert 2005: 00). But this is not what Bede says. The deponent verb *perscrutor* means 'to examine thoroughly', not 'to discourse'. Nor does Bede say that he will 'explain the sacraments', but only 'some' of them. Finally, there is nothing in Bede's Latin about 'readers'.

4 For a correlative reading of the Genesis preface, see Chazelle 2006.

5 See Appendix 2.

6 Meyvaert 2005: 1096.

Luke, but says nothing about finishing a commentary on Ezra.[1]

The bulk of our current evidence does not in fact favour so early a date as the preface to *On Genesis* and the Ezra miniature would have us suppose. The reference to *The Reckoning of Time* remains our strongest lead, and until definitive evidence emerges for treating it otherwise, the safest course is to follow Plummer, Laistner and others who put the completion of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* in the form that we have it sometime after 725.[2] A date later in Bede's career surely fits better with the originality of the project and its relative independence from patristic authority, features uncharacteristic of his earlier commentaries such as those on the Apocalypse and Luke's gospel.[3] Moreover, it highlights the link between *On Ezra and Nehemiah* and *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*, works known to have been composed in the mid to late 720s and ones that are clearly intended to complement *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, the three works together forming something of a complete whole. Beyond that, I propose that a later date better suits the commentary's interest in church reform as well. The theme, though evident in many Bedan works, is one that is detected most readily in his post-720s output, such as the prose *Life of St Cuthbert* and *The Ecclesiastical History*, as Thacker has shown,[4] or *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*.[5] In this connection, it is interesting to consider whether the many close parallels between *On Ezra and Nehemiah* and the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht* – parallels, we recall, that appear only in this one commentary – are perhaps a sign of something more, evidence that Bede's main work on the text took place in, or at least continued until, the early 730s, when evidently the question of reform weighed heavily on his mind. Were this true, *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, not *On the Temple*, might possibly be his latest extant piece

1 See *In Sam.* prol. (10.40–41).

2 Plummer 1896: cl; Laistner 1943: 38. To be sure, Bede's interest in the Ezra material may have begun much earlier, and the possibility that he projected and even began work on a commentary early on but did not finish it until several years later should not be ruled out. The point is simply that most of the evidence we have at present favours a later date for the work's completion.

3 On the indebtedness of the earlier commentaries to patristic authority, see Meyvaert 1976: 44–45 and Robinson 1994: 206–12. For the commentaries on the Apocalypse and Luke in particular, see Mackay 1999; Gryson 2001: 153–77; Kaczynski 2001; Gorman 2002.

4 See Thacker 1983.

5 See DeGregorio 2002.

of exegesis.[1] This may, in fact, explain why *On Ezra and Nehemiah* is the one Bedan commentary that concludes with a first-person prayer – thus linking it, tellingly, to *The Ecclesiastical History* – or why Bede himself repeatedly opines near the end of the work that he need not take the trouble to explain matters in detail, an indication, perhaps, that he is now on in years and growing tired of writing.[2] Of course, the claim that *On Ezra-Nehemiah* is Bede's latest extant commentary must, in our present state of knowledge, remain speculative. Until definitive facts to the contrary emerge, the most we can say is that the majority of our evidence at present favours a later date for the work, placing the bulk of its composition somewhere within in the latter half of the 720s.

MODERN EDITIONS AND THE PRESENT TRANSLATION

This volume presents the first complete translation of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* into any language. It is based on the Latin text edited by David Hurst in volume 119A of the Corpus Christianorum. Hurst's edition, published in 1969, is the third edition of the work published in modern times. The first edition appeared in 1563, as part of the *editio princeps* of the collected works of Bede published in that year in Basel by Johann Herwagen the Younger.[3] The second followed with another edition of Bede's collected works, this one published in London in 1843–44 by J. A. Giles. Giles's edition of *On Ezra and Nehemiah* was in turn reprinted by Migne in volume 91A of the Patrologia Latina.

Though it is hardly the purpose of a translation to re-edit the text being translated, the poor state of Hurst's edition has in select places necessitated some minor editorial modifications. These are indicated throughout the text in the footnotes and summarized in tabular form in Appendix 1. Some of these are little more than corrections of misprints; others involve more drastic emendation where the text Hurst prints appears to be corrupt. I am indebted here to the gracious help of Andrew Goodson and A. C. Dionisotti, both of whom spotted numerous problems in Hurst's text and made helpful suggestions for improvement. Dionisotti also was kind enough to consult for me two

1 See DeGregorio 2004: 21–23.

2 For Bede's prayer, see *In Ezr.* 3.2108–15, to which cf. *HE* 5.24 (570). For his desire to abbreviate his comments, see *In Ezr.* 3.545–46, 643–46, 1383–86, and 1714–15.

3 On Herwagen's edition, see Gorman 2001.

manuscripts of the text not used by Hurst that were readily available to her in the British Library. In a handful of cases the readings supplied by these manuscripts offer valuable support for the changes that have been made.

Unlike the lucid composition of Bede's historical prose, his commentaries, the later ones especially, tend to present a more formidable Latin style, characterized by long flowing sentences and complexities of syntax whose difficulties often have only been compounded by the way modern editors of Bede's exegetical works have handled them, as Richard Sharpe for one has recently demonstrated.[1] In some places, therefore, to ensure the readability of the translated text, it has been necessary to break up Bede's characteristically lengthy sentences into smaller units. In general, however, an effort has been made to reproduce as far as possible the structure of his sentences. For those wishing to read this volume alongside the Latin text, two conventions have been employed to facilitate cross-referencing: 1) the page numbers to the CCSL edition have been placed in the outside margins of the translated text; 2) the line numbers to that edition have been specified every twenty-five lines within the translated text in boldface and brackets (e.g. ***/25/***). References to *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, therefore, employ just the book and line number (e.g. *In Ezr*. 1.25); all other Bedan works are cited by the book number (where applicable), followed in parenthesis by the page and line numbers to the appropriate CCSL edition [e.g. *De tab*. 1 (5.25)]. A list of abbreviations for Bede's works may be found on pp. x–xi.

Scriptural quotations have been translated afresh to reflect Bede's usage, though his Latin spelling of biblical names has been replaced by the conventional modern spellings used in the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). In those cases where Bede's Latin spelling of a word is germane to the point he is making (for example, when he points out at the beginning of Book 2 that Jesus and Joshua are in fact the same name), the Latin spelling is given first followed by the NRSV spelling in parentheses: [e.g. Jesus (Jeshua)]. Citations from the Psalms give the NRSV numbering first, followed (where necessary) by the Vulgate numbering in parentheses. Text quoted from Ezra–Nehemiah appears always in boldface; all other quotations from Scripture are represented in italics. Citations from classical and

1 Sharpe 2005.

patristic authors are given in quotation marks. Biblical, classical, and patristic sources have been listed in the notes as well as in the Index of Sources and Allusions; while many of these are recorded by Hurst in his edition, several others are identified here for the first time and so give the present volume an additional utility. More than previous translations, I have also attempted in the notes to record important parallels, echoes, and generally helpful passages elsewhere in Bede's writings, in order to bring out the intertextual dimensions of his oeuvre. Finally, references to primary and secondary works used in this volume are given in abbreviated form in the notes, supplemented by complete citations in the Bibliography.

ON EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

PROLOGUE

When the famous translator and teacher of Holy Scripture Jerome was briefly running through the books of that same Scripture in a letter to a friend and summarily treating the contents of each, he said *Ezra and Nehemiah (that is to say, the helper and the consoler from the Lord), are the subject of a single book.*[1] *They restore the temple and raise up the walls of the city. [In this book,] the whole crowd of the people returning to their homeland, and the description of Israel's priests, Levites and proselytes, and even the works of the walls and towers divided up between individual families – all these display one meaning in the bark and retain another in the marrow*.[2] And so, most reverend Bishop Acca,[3] complying diligently with your exhortations, I have put my effort into considering this volume, trusting in our true Helper and Consoler, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that he may be gracious to give us [the ability] to find, when the bark of the text is peeled back, something deeper and more sacred in the marrow of the spiritual sense,[4] since by prophetic figures but in a clear way it designates the [237]

1 In Hebrew, the name Ezra means 'helper', Nehemiah 'Yahweh comforts': cf. *In Ezr*. 2.877–78 and 3.5–6. '…[A]re the subject of a single book' = *in uno volumine narrantur*: literally, 'are related in one volume'. The ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Latin versions of the Bible Bede knew did not treat Nehemiah as a separate book, as Protestant Bibles do today. Thus at *In Ezr*. 1.547 Bede refers to the Nehemiah material as coming 'in the second part of the book' (*in secunda parte libri*). For more on this, see the recent discussion of Bogaert 2000: 9–11.

2 Jerome *Epistula* 53 (CSEL 54:461.19–462.4).

3 Acca, abbot and bishop of the Northumbrian see of Hexham from 709 to 732; for discussion of his involvement with Bede's commentaries, see Introduction, p. xxv, n. 1, and p. xxvi, n. 1.

4 Though Bede is credited as the first to articulate a fully developed account of the medieval notion of Scripture's four senses (historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical), in this commentary he often distinguishes, as he does here, only two levels of interpretation: the literal, which contains the historical details of the biblical narra-

Lord himself and his temple and city, which we are. In this work the greatest help to us was the aforementioned teacher of the Church, Jerome, in his explanation of the prophets,[1] who themselves had foretold that the same events which Ezra and Nehemiah wrote about would be carried out under the figure of Christ and the Church.

CHAPTER HEADINGS[2]

[238] 1. At the beginning of his reign, Cyrus brings an end to the captivity of the people of God and, with the return of the holy vessels, orders the people to go up to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.
2. The number of those who returned to Judea under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua is described, along with the sum of money that the leading men of the fathers offered for the rebuilding of the temple.
3. In the seventh month, the ancient people are brought together in Jerusalem and, once the altar is built, they hold the Feast of Tabernacles and thereafter the other feasts of the Lord.
4. In the second year of their coming, the house of the Lord is begun but is prevented from being completed by the people of the land.
5. The Samaritans write letters of accusation to the kings of the

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tive; and the spiritual, also called the allegorical, mystical, figurative, typic, or higher, which holds the theological truths beyond the literal meaning of the text or, to use Bede's metaphor here, those contained within its bark. On the classical and patristic roots of this metaphor, see de Lubac 2000: 2.59. For discussion of Bede's exegetical practice, see Jones 1969–70: 131–51; Robinson 1994; Brown 1987: 42–61; Ward 1990: 41–87; and Holder 1989a and 1990. For Bede's most detailed remarks on the four senses of Scripture, see *De tab*. 1 (25.781–811) and *In Cant* 3 (260.610–25).

1 *in explanatione prophetarum*. In addition to his other accomplishments, Jerome was the foremost commentator on the prophets among the Fathers, producing exegetical tracts on Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the minor prophets. Given his use of the singular noun *explanatione*, Bede may be referring here to a single work of Jerome's, such as his commentary on the minor prophets, which Bede uses liberally in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*. However, as he also relies on Jerome's work on Isaiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah, the reference may be more general in scope, alluding to Jerome's work on the prophets as a whole.

2 The following chapter headings (*capitula*) are Bede's compositions. As the tally of his works listed at the end of the *Ecclesiastical History* records (*HE* 5.24), Bede drafted such *capitula* for several Old and New Testament books. For discussion, see Meyvaert 1995.

Persians and prevent the work of the temple through an edict of royal letters.
6. At the exhortation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Jeshua build the temple of God. Tattenai governor beyond the river asks King Darius what should be done about this.
7. After reviewing Cyrus's letters, Darius orders that the temple be rebuilt, a task completed in the sixth year of his reign.
8. The descendants of the exiles dedicate the house of God and celebrate the Feast of the Passover.
9. Ezra the priest comes up from Babylon possessing gracious letters from King Artaxerxes to all the guardians of the public treasury beyond the river, in which he paid respect both to Ezra and the temple of the Lord.
10. The number of those who came up with Ezra and how they obtained the Lord's assistance on their journey by fasting and praying.
11. Ezra weighs out the donations of the king and his counsellors that were to be offered in Jerusalem to the chief priests, who offer holocausts to the Lord when they arrive there.
12. Hearing that the people of Israel have been polluted by foreign wives, Ezra takes up the garb of a mourner and begs pardon for their crime from the Lord.
13. As Ezra prays and weeps, the people too are turned to penance and with unanimous consent are separated from foreign wives. *[239]*
14. The number of those who cast out the foreign wives they had married.
15. When Nehemiah, cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, hears of the distress of those who were at Jerusalem, he fasts, prays and implores the Lord's mercy.
16. Having received the permission and letters of the king, Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem to rebuild the city; from this year are counted the seventy weeks of years that the angel foretold to Daniel, and which extend up to the time of the Lord's passion.
17. Arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah ponders at night the destruction of the walls and in the morning, explaining the reason for his coming there, strengthens the heart and hands of the people to rebuild.
18. The wall, towers, and gates of Jerusalem are rebuilt at the beginning of the high priesthood of Eliashib.
19. Sanballat and Tobias deride the builders but are treated with contempt; they prepare to make war but are driven back by prayers

and weapons.
20. The builders, all armed and prepared for battle, thus persist in the rebuilding of the walls.
21. When the people are stirred into a tumult due to hunger and poverty, Nehemiah entreats the nobles and magistrates not to exact interest from their brethren but rather to give money on their behalf.
22. Nehemiah expounds how much devotion he himself has shown the people.
23. Sanballat and his allies try to divert Nehemiah from building the wall, even hiring plotters within the community against him; but once he finds these out, the city wall is brought to completion.
24. Once the city of Jerusalem is rebuilt the Gentiles grow afraid; but Nehemiah counts the singers and appoints guardians for the gates.
25. To be able to find suitable inhabitants for the city, he rereads the census book of those who were the first to come up from Babylon to Judea.
[240] 26. In the seventh month, the people are gathered in Jerusalem, and they listen with attentive ears as Ezra reads the law of Moses.
27. They hold the Feast of Tabernacles, with Ezra reading God's law to them each day.
28. When the Feast of Tabernacles is over, they come together once more to declare their faith, read, and pray before the Lord.
29. The prayer or confession of Ezra, in which he begs the Lord to recall the pact that he had with their fathers.
30. The leaders together with the people strike a covenant and put it in writing, that they will observe all the Lord's commandments and promote the ceremonies of his house.
31. The leaders from the children of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi reside in Jerusalem together with a tenth of the rest of the people.
32. The offspring of the high priest Jeshua and those who at that time were leaders of the priests and Levites are set forth.
33. The city of Jerusalem is dedicated with a joyous feast, and the watchmen in charge of the storerooms of the treasury for the sacred offerings are listed.
34. All foreigners are separated from Israel, and the portions of the Levites and the first-fruits of the priests are put in the treasury of the Lord's house.
35. Upon his return from Babylon to Jerusalem, Nehemiah once again purges the treasuries of the vessels of the Gentiles and returns to that

place those articles proper to the house of the Lord.
36. He also takes assiduous care that the Sabbath rest should not be violated by the trade of the Gentiles.
37. He also purges the Jews from foreign wives and appoints orders of priests and Levites, each in his own ministry. May he be remembered in the memory of his God with favour.

BOOK ONE

[241] It is evident to all readers that in the Holy Scriptures each one of the elect and all the Church together (i.e. the whole body of the just) are customarily called God's house or temple, because God deigns to dwell in the hearts of those who believe and hope in him and love him, according to what he himself says: *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him*.[1] Hence the Apostle also says: *The temple of God is holy, and you are it*;[2] and in the epistle to the Hebrews: *And Moses was faithful as a servant in all his house, testifying to what would be said. But Christ is faithful as a son in his house. And we are this house, if we hold fast the confidence and glory of hope unto the end*.[3] King Solomon built a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem[4] as a symbol of this house or spiritual temple, for Solomon, which means 'peaceful',[5] himself fittingly contains a figure of him about whom the prophet proclaims: *His empire will be multiplied, and there will be no end of peace*.[6] The Apostle of the Church, when writing about the Gentiles, said regarding him: *And he came and preached peace to you that were far away and peace to those that were near. For through him we both have access to the Father in one spirit*.[7] Furthermore, the fact that Solomon built the temple in seven years but finished and dedicated it in the eighth[8] signifies that during all the time of this world, which is encom-

1 John 14:23.

2 1 Cor. 3:17.

3 Heb. 3:5–6; cf. Num. 12:7.

4 1 Kings 5:1–7:51; 2 Chron. 2:1–4:22. As monarch of the Israelites, Solomon was responsible for the construction of the first Jerusalem temple, which his father King David had intended to build (see 2 Kings 7:1–29). Bede devoted an entire commentary, *De templo*, to the biblical account detailing the first temple's construction.

5 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:138.5); cf. Bede *Hom.* 2.24 (364.231–34).

6 Is. 9:7.

7 Eph. 2:17–18.

8 1 Kings 6:38, 8:22–63.

passed in seven days,[1] the Lord is building a Church by gathering **/25/** the faithful to its heavenly edifice. Hereafter, in the life to come when the glory of his resurrection is made visible, he brings it to its perfect state and raises it up into the joy of immortal life in the everlasting vision of his glory. For since he himself rose again from the dead on the eighth day (i.e. after the seventh day, the Sabbath), the time of our resurrection is also rightly expressed by the number eight.[2]

Now the fact that later on some of the temple buildings began to deteriorate due to their great age but were soon restored and brought to their former state by the urging of the kings and priests who lived at that time, signifies the daily and most trivial sins of the faithful. *[242]* About such people Solomon says *Seven times the righteous man falls and rises again*.[3] By the Lord's gift, they are likewise corrected by their own daily diligence through the examples or exhortations of the righteous who went before, as though through the industry of God's kings and priests. For all the perfect in the Church are deservedly called kings and priests since they are members of the most high priest and king, insofar as they have learned to rule themselves well and to offer God a living sacrifice with their bodies.[4]

The fact that afterwards, through mounting evils, this same temple was profaned by the filth of idols[5] and ultimately destroyed and burned down by the Chaldeans[6] signifies the more weighty faults of those who, though they were united with the members of the Holy Church through the confession of the right faith and the sacrament of the washing of salvation,[7] nonetheless were cast down once more from the

1 On the notion of the time of the world encompassing a period of seven days, which Bede draws from his *The Reckoning of Time*, see below *In Ezr*. 1.1073–74 and the accompanying note.

2 Cf. the similar passages at *In Gen*. 2 (119.1654–58) and especially *Hom*. 2.24 (364.240–365. 250), which also discusses the literal and spiritual meanings of the temple. The association of the number seven with rest and eight with resurrection comes from Augustine: see *Contra Faustum Manichaeorum* 12.19 (CSEL 25:347.13–348.15). The allegorical significance of numbers figures prominently in Bede's exegesis: for discussion, see Jones 1969–70: 166–74, and Meyer and Suntrup 1987.

3 Prov. 24:16.

4 Cf. Rom. 12:1. For similar analogies between kings and priests and the perfect in this commentary, see *In Ezr*. 1.934–38, 1506–10, 1657–62; also *De templ*. 2 (207.607–10).

5 2 Kings 21:2–3; 2 Chron. 33:7.

6 2 Kings 25:9; 2 Chron. 36:19.

7 *sacramentum lauacri salutaris*. As early as St Paul's epistles (e.g. Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5), baptism was referred to as a 'bath' or 'washing' (*lavacrum*), evidently because the

foundation of the faith by the deception of evil spirits and were consumed in the flame of vices. After the temple had been demolished and the city of Jerusalem likewise destroyed, its people were deported to Babylonia,[1] **/50/** but seventy years later,[2] when they had done penance for their iniquities, they were sent back to their homeland through the Lord's mercy and also with great labour restored the temple and the holy city.[3] Figuratively, this designates those who, having been deceived by the devil, not only destroy the sincerity of the faith and the integrity of good works, but also through the bitterness of their sins seem to be like Gentiles and publicans, according to that saying of the Lord: *And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to you as a pagan or a tax-gatherer*.[4] Yet some of these people, regaining their senses through the regard of divine grace, return to the Church when they are pricked in the heart[5] by the illumination of the Holy Spirit and begin again to hear and keep the precepts of the divine law which they had abandoned. For there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which the prophet Isaiah enumerates and clearly distinguishes,[6] but the sum of all the divine law is contained in the ten commandments, and seven multiplied by ten is seventy. It is appropriate, then, that those who were held as captives in Babylonia as a result of wicked works are freed after seventy years, and that they rebuild God's house and the holy

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main form of baptism in early times was immersion of the catechumen in water. The word 'baptism', in fact, is derived from the Greek verb *baptizein* 'to dip or immerse'. Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1767–69.

1 2 Kings 24:10–16; 2 Chron. 36:10–13.

2 Bede derives this number from Jer. 29:10 (cf. 2 Chron. 36:21 and Zech. 1:12); while he no doubt believed this figure to be accurate, it does not correspond to historical fact, for the Babylonians destroyed the temple in 587 BC and the Jews began to rebuild it in 538 BC, i.e. only 49 years later. Cf. below, *In Ezr*. 1.1431.

3 These events are the subject of Ezra–Nehemiah.

4 Matt. 18:17.

5 *compuncti*: cf. *In Ezr*. 3.67. Originally a medical term used to describe the physical pain of illness, the Latin *compunctio* (from *cum* 'with' + *pungere* 'to prick or puncture') came in ecclesiastical and monastic usage to express the spiritual pain resulting from sin and concupiscence. The 'prick' of compunction is felt in the heart, the *compunctio cordis* mentioned in the New Testament (see Acts 2:37) and in a range of patristic and monastic texts, Cassian's and Gregory the Great's foremost among them: see Sullivan 1961 and McEntire 1987.

6 Is. 11:2–3. These seven gifts of the Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, godliness, and fear of the Lord. Bede mentions these gifts again in *De templ*. 2 (197.198–201).

city. For often those who were separated because of their sins from the communion and society of the Holy Church and joined to the fate and number of infidels, in turn through the gift of the Holy Spirit exercise themselves zealously in the pursuit of good works and in this way regain the fellowship of the faithful, i.e. the Lord's house and city from which they were cast out. For it should be noted that **/75/** the rebuilding *[243]* of the Lord's house after it was burnt down, the restoration of Jerusalem after its destruction, the return of the people to their homeland after their captivity, and the recovery of the stolen holy vessels to their house all typologically denote this one and the same return of penitents to the Church. But since the prophet Ezra sufficiently explains how all these things came to pass, I want to relate some episodes from this book and, so far as the Lord will grant, to expound them according to the spiritual sense so that it may be more clearly disclosed how those who have perished due to negligence and error should be brought back to repentance, by how much grace of God and by how much effort of their own pardon ought to be sought and procured for the sins they have committed, and how these same penitents together with those who have recently come to the faith should build one and the same house of Christ and together look forward to the ceremonies of its dedication in the future.

[1:1–2] In the first year[1] **of Cyrus king of the Persians, in order that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of the Persians, and he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also in writing declared: 'Thus says Cyrus king of the Persians: the Lord, the God of heaven, has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he himself has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judea'.** The ancient accounts,[2] with which the writings of the prophet Daniel

1 This refers to the 'first year' of Cyrus's reign not in Persia but in Babylon, that is, to the year 538 BC: see p. 10, n. 2 below. Bede, however, appears not to have known this: see *In Ezr*. 2.465–68 and the accompanying note.

2 *veteres historiae*. Bede may have borrowed this phrase from Jerome, who employs it in his *On Daniel*: see *In Danielem* 3.10.21 (CCSL 75A:896.797). The accounts in question are most likely those of the Jewish priest and scholar Flavius Josephus (*c.* 35–100), who in Books 10 and 11 of his *Antiquities of the Jews* discusses the Persian defeat of the Babylonians and the subsequent liberation of the Jews and their repatriation in Judea: see *Antiquitates Judaicae* 10.11.1–4. This work of Josephus, which in twenty books relates the history of the Jews from Creation to the mid-first century, was a major source for Jewish history in the Middle Ages, and Bede uses it liberally throughout *On Ezra*

agree,[1] relate that Cyrus king of the Persians,[2] having joined together with his ally Darius king of the Medes,[3] destroyed the kingdom of the Babylonians, after killing Belshazzar, the last of their kings, and razing the city and laying it waste. This Cyrus, no doubt realizing that the kingdom had been handed over to him by the God of Israel, **/100/** as soon as he conquered the kingdom which had captured the Israelites and was oppressing them in slavery, gave them permission to return to their homeland and to rebuild the house of their God that had been destroyed by fire there. He communicated this declaration of freedom not only by word of mouth to those who were present there, but dispatched letters as well throughout all the provinces of his kingdom to those who lived further away, publicly acknowledging that he who is the God of Israel is the true Lord and God of heaven and the Creator of all kingdoms.

The holy prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah clearly foretold that all these events would thus come to pass. Jeremiah even predicted the number

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and Nehemiah and in his other commentaries. Josephus wrote in Greek but Bede, like other medieval writers, probably knew the text in the Latin translation prepared by Cassiodorus at Vivarium, though Laistner 1935: 246–47, speculated that Bede may have known and used the Greek original.

1 Dan. 5:30; cf. Jerome *In Danielem* 2.5.30–31 (CCSL 75A:827.189–828.204).

2 Cyrus the Great (600–530 BC) was the founder of the Persian Empire, which he ruled as king from 559 to 530. In 553, then acting as prince of Anshan, a vassal kingdom of the Medes, he rebelled against the Median king Astyages and united the Medes and the Persians into a single kingdom; seven years later he began a campaign against Babylonia, which ended in his conquest of Babylon in 539/538 and the subsequent release of the Jewish exiles: see McKenzie 1965: 167. These events are reported in detail by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (*Histories* 1.123–30, 189–91). In the Old Testament, Cyrus appears as the hope of restoration of Judah and Jerusalem; for more on this, see below, p. 12, n. 6.

3 The Medes as a people take their name from Media, an ancient Iranian kingdom that rose to power in the seventh century BC. They were under Assyrian domination until they united with the Babylonians in 625 BC and helped defeat the Assyrian empire, though later they were allied to the Persians and fought against the Babylonians: see Bilkes 2000b. In the table of nations in Gen. 10:2, the Medes are listed with the children of Japheth: cf. 1 Chron. 1:5. Their leader Darius, mentioned here, is not to be confused with the famous Darius king of Persia, who ruled the Persian Empire two generations after Cyrus and whom Bede mentions later. The earlier 'Darius the Mede' who gained control of the Chaldean kingdom after Belshazzar's death is mentioned in Daniel as the king who put Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6:14–17) and under whom this prophet had his famous vision of the 70 weeks of the years (Dan. 9). These references put this Median Darius between the reign of Belshazzar and that of the emperor Cyrus the Great (cf. Dan. 5:30–6:1, 28).

of years in which they would be held captive in Babylonia and when they would be brought back to their homeland, whereas Isaiah, without any of the obscurities of prophetic speech, even revealed the name of King Cyrus, by whom they were to be freed from slavery, brought back to their homeland, and by whose permission they would restore the temple. For Jeremiah says: *Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, to all that I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon*: *Build houses and dwell in them*. *For thus says the Lord of Hosts, when the seventy years have begun to be fulfilled in Babylon, I will come to you and raise up my voice over you and bring you back to that place*.[1] And Isaiah says: *This is what the Lord says, your Redeemer and Maker from the womb: 'I am the Lord, who make all things;'*[2] and a little farther on: *I who say to the deep: 'Be desolate, and I will dry up your rivers'. I who say to Cyrus: 'You are my shepherd, and shall perform all my will'. I who say to Jerusalem: 'You shall be built'; and to the temple: 'Your foundation shall be laid'*.[3] **/125/** *This is what the Lord says to my anointed Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of so that I may subdue nations before him and turn the backs of kings, and I will open doors before him and gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the great ones of the earth; I will knock down the gates of bronze and break through bars of iron. I will give you hidden treasures and secrets of secrets, so that you may know that I who call your name am the Lord, the God of Israel. For the sake of Jacob my servant and of Israel my elect, I have summoned you by name and have made you like [them], though you have not known me.*[4] *I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I have armed you, and you have not known me*.[5] From this prophecy of Isaiah it ought to be believed that King Cyrus greatly loved the children of Israel and freed them from captivity and sent them home and *[244]*

1 Jer. 29:4–5, 10.

2 Is. 44:24.

3 Is. 44:27–28.

4 Is. 45:4. The Latin reads, *Assimilavi te et non cognovisti me*. The phrase *assimilavi te* does not appear in the Hebrew as we have it today, while the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) has *prosdexomai se* 'I will accept you' – that is, as a chosen servant like Jacob and Israel, who are mentioned previously in the same verse. In interpreting this verse below, however, Bede appears to alter the context slightly and to reinterpret *assimilavi te* to mean not 'I have made you like them' but 'I have made you like him', i.e. made Cyrus an image of Christ: see below, *In Ezr*. 1.148–56.

5 Is. 45:1–5.

commanded them to rebuild the Lord's temple, because he had heard what their prophets had foretold through the spirit of God concerning Cyrus' kingdom and the destruction of the Babylonians' kingdom.[1] For these prophets had specifically described the kind of assault by which Cyrus seized Babylon, of whom Isaiah says: *I who say to the deep: Be desolate, and I will dry up your rivers*;[2] but Jeremiah: *That very wall of Babylon, very broad though it is, shall be utterly broken down, and her high gates shall be set on fire*.[3] For the accounts tell that the enemy entered Babylon via the dry and abandoned bed of the River Euphrates, which flows through the middle of the city but which had been diverted and emptied into many channels.[4] Let this much be said briefly concerning the historical sense.

According to the mystical senses, however, King Cyrus represents the Lord Saviour both in name and deeds. This we have learned not from our own surmise **/150/** but from Isaiah's very clear words, in which he said in the person of the Lord: *I have made you like [him], though*
[245] *you have not known me*.[5] For God made Cyrus like his Son – although Cyrus himself by no means knew the God who did this – firstly because he deigned to call him his anointed,[6] then because he arranged long before he was born that he should be called Cyrus, which means 'heir'.[7] Indeed, this word well suits him to whom God the Father says, *Ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance*,[8] and about whom

1 Cf. Jerome *In Esaiam* 12.45 (CCSL 73A:504.39–506.90).

2 Is. 44:27.

3 Jer. 51:58.

4 Cf. Herodotus *Histories* 1.191, which reports that at the siege of Babylon Cyrus ordered his men to drain part of the Euphrates by digging a small canal and siphoning the water into a nearby lake, thus allowing his forces to enter the city through the partially emptied riverbed. These details were available to Bede in such intermediate Latin sources as Orosius *Historiarum adversos paganos* 2.6 (CSEL 5:94.17–96.6).

5 Is. 45:4. See above p. 11, n. 4, for comment.

6 Is. 45:1. In this verse, Cyrus is called *christo meo* 'my anointed,' the Greek *christos* translating the Hebrew *māšîah* 'anointed one, messiah'. In Old Testament usage, this is a title reserved for the kings of Judah and Israel whose kingdom is a figure of Christ (see Juel 2000), and it may therefore seem strange that Cyrus – who, though said to have revered the God of Israel, nevertheless remained a heathen – is called by this name. However, as Bede goes on to clarify, Cyrus resembles Christ insofar as he discharges the messiah-like role of freeing the Jews from captivity and sending them home to rebuild the temple: see below, *In Ezr*. 2.979–85.

7 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:120.25).

8 Ps. 2:8.

the Apostle says, *Whom he has appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the world*;[1] and when he appeared in the flesh, even the enemies who persecuted him said, *This is the heir; come and let us kill him; and the inheritance shall be ours*.[2] But also in the fact that God the Father subdued the nations before Cyrus, turned the backs of kings, knocked down gates of bronze and broke through bars of iron, namely those of Babylon or of the other cities that Cyrus seized, and in the fact that he gave him hidden treasures and secrets in secret places, i.e. the unknown riches of various provinces[3] – in all this God made Cyrus a likeness of our Lord and Saviour. For when the apostles were preaching throughout the world, our Lord subdued the necks of all nations to himself and subordinated even the masters of earthly affairs and the authors of secular wisdom to his own authority; he destroyed the gates of hell that he might from there free his elect and lead them to the freedom of the celestial homeland; and he refuted the errors of the pagan peoples and through the mouths of the humble overthrew teachings founded on human reason, so that when these errors had been corrected, he could reveal the light of his faith and truth *in which all the treasures of wisdom* **/175/** *and knowledge are hidden*.[4] Our Lord, in his divine nature, possessed these treasures eternally from the Father; but after assuming his human nature he no doubt received them from that time when he became man. Therefore, the Lord made Cyrus like his only-begotten Son, our God and Lord, Jesus Christ, because just as Cyrus freed God's people when he destroyed the kingdom of the Chaldeans, sent them back to their homeland, ordered that the temple destroyed by fire in Jerusalem be rebuilt, and even took care to publicize this edict in writing in order that Jeremiah's words might be fulfilled in which he predicted that this would happen, so in the same way *the mediator of God and men*,[5] having destroyed the devil's reign over the world, reclaims his elect who have been scattered by the devil's tyranny and gathers them into his Church, which not only in the present has been justified by faith and has peace with God through Christ,[6] but also in the future hastens

1 Heb. 1:2.

2 Mark 12:7.

3 These lines offer a close paraphrase of Is. 45:1–3, which Bede quotes just above at *In Ezr*. 1.125–30.

4 Col. 2:3.

5 1 Tim. 2:5; cf. John 11:52.

6 Cf. Rom. 5:1.

towards the vision of perpetual peace: for Jerusalem means 'vision of peace'.[1]

He also causes the temple that was destroyed by fire to be rebuilt
[246] when, leading back to salvation those who have lost their faith through the attacks of the ancient enemy, he makes them worthy of his dwelling. Moreover, he also sent into the whole world holy writings[2] by which he could proclaim the faith of his name and the hope of salvation to all who belong to his kingdom, that is to all the elect. Not only Jeremiah but all the prophets by common consensus foretold that this would happen, in accordance with what he himself said to his disciples: *For everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms*.[3] Now the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of the Persians so that, when he recognized **/200/** the power and providence of the God of Israel, he would carry out those things that Scripture relates about him. In the Gospel, the Lord says to the Jews: *When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own but speak what the Father has taught me.*[4] But as to what Cyrus himself said in his letter, **the Lord, the God of heaven, has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth**, he properly confessed that the Lord God of Israel is indeed the God of heaven since he realized that he also holds all the kingdoms of the earth in his power and can give them to whomever he wishes. But it seems to sound less true when he says that all the kingdoms of the world were handed over to him by God, unless we should perhaps understand that at the time in which Cyrus wrote these things, there was no one to contest his rule; or at all events that after he had conquered, destroyed, and brought to an end as mighty and ancient a kingdom as that of the Chaldeans, he believed that no one in the whole world could oppose his rule. Yet this expression truly agrees with the majesty of him who says: *All power is given to me in heaven and in earth*.[5] The same letter of Cyrus continues:

[1:3] 'Any of those among you who are of his people – may their God be with them! – are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judea, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel: he is the God who is

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).
2 I.e. the New Testament, particularly the Gospels.
3 Luke 24:44.
4 John 8:28.
5 Matt. 28:18.

in Jerusalem'. The king's great faith and great mercy is evident in these words – faith in that he understood that, before other nations, the people of Israel are God's people; mercy because without exception he allowed all who wished to return to their homeland to do so as free people; faith because he acknowledged that the same Lord God not only dwelt in heaven and was in Jerusalem but also could go up with each of those who were returning from Babylon to Jerusalem. **/225/** Is it not clearer than light that Cyrus believed this God to be not corporeal and confinable in terms of place but a spirit and present everywhere? He confessed that God was present in Jerusalem and in the temple and yet did not doubt that he ruled simultaneously in the kingdom of heaven. And he believed that he ruled in heaven in such a way that he was nevertheless with his faithful on earth and guided their hearts and hands to the doing of those things which are salutary.

Moreover, all the words of this passage are redolent with the spiritual sense. For to whom is it not readily apparent that it is only those whom God is with who can journey from the confusion of sins to works of virtue as though from the slavery of Babylon to freedom in Jerusalem, since we are able to do nothing without him?[1] Who would not rightly see that the reason that the word 'going up'[2] is used in the same sentence is no doubt that all who sin and are enslaved to the cares of this world are in the lowest place, whereas those who desire to please God must direct their mind to higher matters, sigh after the things of heaven, and through love of the eternal rise above all the pomp and enticements of the world? It is also mentioned that Jerusalem is in Judea (i.e. in 'confession'),[3] in order that we who have deserved through forgetfulness of God to be held captive by the Chaldeans (which means 'demons', i.e. evil spirits)[4] and through the confession of divine mercy to be set free may return to the vision of free peace[5] and light and there build a house to the Lord God of Israel. That is to say, we should prepare our own hearts (which the Lord himself **/250/** deigns graciously to dwell in and to illuminate with his presence) in the unity of universal peace, in the confession either of our own sin or *[247]*

1 Cf. John 15:5.

2 *ascensionem*, from *ascendere* 'to go or rise up'.

3 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:67.19).

4 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:64.22–23).

5 Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

of his divine mercy and grace, but we must also take care to inflame the hearts of our neighbours to the praise of their Creator and to works of mercy. And so in both these ways we build a house to the Lord when we either exercise ourselves in works of righteousness or call forth those whom we can to the path of righteousness by examples and by words.[1] The rest of King Cyrus' edict follows:

[1:4] 'And let the others in all places wherever they reside help him each from his place with gold and silver, and goods and livestock, in addition to voluntary offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem'.

The difference in words should be noted. For the king gave permission to all those who had been freed from the injustice of captivity that whoever wished might, with the Lord's guidance, go up to build the temple. Yet he did not order everyone to go up there, for if there were any among the same people of God whom it pleased more to make use of the liberty given to them in any other places, he ordered that these people, each one from his own place, should assist those who were going up, namely by giving them money and livestock for their needs on such a long journey. But he desired that they also give and entrust other gifts to them that they should offer in the Lord's temple when they arrived there in memory of those who sent them. Therefore, all were freed from the Babylonian captivity, all dedicated themselves
[248] to acts of devotion, but only the more perfect went up to build a temple for the Lord. The rest aided those who went up, because even if all the elect, after being freed from the power of darkness,[2] attain *the freedom of the glory of the children of God*,[3] and all rejoice that they are counted among **/275/** the fellowship of the holy city (i.e. the Church), yet even so it is not the duty of everyone but only of the perfect to labour in the building up of this Church even by preaching

1 Throughout his writings, Bede emphasizes that the Christian's deeds and words are a key means to leading others to salvation. The good teacher, he insists, is not merely someone who knows the mysteries of the faith, but someone whose own way of life exemplifies the same truths that are conveyed through preaching. Thus of Aidan, the Irish monk summoned by King Oswald to help convert the Northumbrians, Bede wrote: '…the best recommendation of his teaching to all was that he taught them no other way of life than that which he himself practised among his fellows' – *HE* 3.5 (227). Cf. *In Ezr.* 1.925–29 and 2.1415–24. For commentary on this theme, see Carroll 1946: 216–49; Bonner 1970: 41–42; DeGregorio 1999: 3–15.

2 Cf. Col. 1:13.

3 Rom. 8:21.

to others.[1] Consequently, such people, more than the rest of the faithful, are thought by the Apostle to be worthy of twofold honour,[2] as also the angel says to Daniel: *Those who are learned shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who instruct many to righteousness, like stars for everlasting eternities*.[3] And evidently the more the instructors of the multitude train their hearers to seek and love the things of heaven, the less they themselves care about acquiring or possessing earthly things. Rather, very often they abandon all the temporal things they have acquired for the hope of things eternal. Thus, in order that they may continue to preach, their needs must be sustained by the generosity of richer persons who are unable to preach. In this way, even rich people themselves can be participants in this preaching.[4] From the viewpoint of these people, John says to Gaius: *It was for the sake of the name that they went out, receiving no help from*

1 Bede often uses the designation 'the perfect' (*perfecti*) in speaking of a select group among the faithful, but only rarely does he explain what this term means. To be sure, it does not mean somebody who has reached a state of absolute perfection, since this can be accomplished only in heaven. Rather, as Bede explains at *In Ezr*. 3.1406–10, the perfect are those who 'draw near in mind to the heavenly mysteries and… imitate the peace of highest blessedness amidst the whirlwinds of this transient life'. They differ from the rest of the faithful in that they 'are willing to sell all their belongings and give them as alms to the poor and in this way to follow the Lord' (3.1416–17). This implies that the perfect are those in monastic and clerical states who strive to attain a level of holiness higher than that sought by the laity. On the matter of the perfect and preaching, however, Bede is not always clear. For while at times he insists, as he does here, that it is the perfect alone who are to preach the Gospel – see *De tab*. 3 (340.72–341.87) and *De templ*. 2 (196.166–71) – he elsewhere implies that this task falls to any of the faithful who live well: cf. *Hom*. 1.7 (49.99–117) and *De templ*. 2 (290.80–94).

2 Cf. 1 Tim. 5:17.

3 Dan. 12:3.

4 Bede's argument here, namely that the acquisition of material wealth can be redeemed by giving it to preachers, reflects the reforming concerns of his *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*. As such, it constitutes the first of a series of parallels between this commentary and the letter (see also *In Ezr*. 1.1458–70; 2.597–604, 619–26, 1474–79; 3.66–74, 820–37, 887–99, 1866–74). To be sure, Bede's point is not that preachers should be remunerated for their preaching, for the *Letter* is vehement in denouncing 'those who most sedulously demand earthly recompense from those who listen to them' – *Epist. Ecg*. 8 (411–12). Yet Bede was not against wealth per se, only the improper use of it, as Carroll 1946: 147–48, has noted. Indeed he imagined a Church abundantly supported by secular wealth and in the letter offered King Ceolwulf (to whom he dedicated *HE*) as a model of just such sponsorship – see *Epist. Ecg*. 9 (412). For more on the parallels between this commentary and the *Letter*, see the Introduction, pp. xxxi–xxxiii and DeGregorio 2004: 6–20.

the Gentiles. We ought therefore to receive such people so that we may work together for the truth.[1] For this reason it is now said that those who were going up to build the Lord's house should be assisted by generous gifts of money from their friends wherever they were residing, i.e. whether in Chaldea or in other places to which they had fled from fear of the Chaldeans. **In addition to**, he said, **voluntary offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem,** because it behoves those who abound in temporal riches not only to give from these what is necessary to the poor of Christ but also themselves willingly to do what good works **/300/** they can on their own behalf, in order that by the merit of these, as of a voluntary offering, they may themselves deserve to have a place in God's temple, which is the Church. Let it suffice to have said this much about King Cyrus' letter.

Let no one doubt that Cyrus' words overflow with spiritual mysteries, since it was foretold that God stirred up his spirit to understand that these things must be written or commanded, and since the prophet Ezra himself informs us that Cyrus had given these orders to the people so that the words of the prophets would be fulfilled. For how could it happen that the king, who is proven to have known and confessed God and to have loved and established the true beauty of his house, would not be able to write down heavenly secrets when instructed by the divine will, given that the faithless governor, the
[249] enemy and murderer of our Redeemer,[2] had truly written the great mystery of our faith as he placed it above his cross, *This is Jesus the Nazarene, king of the Jews*,[3] and remained so determined to keep this inscription that the Jews, though protesting vigorously, were still unable to alter it.[4] For the sake of a certain mystery[5] for us, [Pilate] wrote this inscription in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, doubtless because

1 3 John 1:7–8.

2 I.e. Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea who sentenced Christ to death upon the Cross.

3 Matt. 27:37; John 19:19; cf. Luke 23:38.

4 John 19:21–22.

5 'for the sake of a certain mystery' = *certii mysterii gratia*. In Bede's usage, the Latin noun *mysterium* is close in meaning to the comparable exegetical term 'allegory', in that it refers to the deeper 'spiritual' sense to be found in the biblical text or, in de Lubac's words, 'in the realities of which the text speaks' (de Lubac 2000: 2.86). Throughout, the word has been translated literally as 'mystery': see *In Ezr*. 1.317, 499, 1413; 2.132, 435, 913, 1393, 2009; and 3.443, 482, 1513, 1988.

all the divine law which the Hebrews had, all the human wisdom about which the Greeks used to boast, and all the terrestrial kingdom in which the Romans at that time were especially pre-eminent, bear witness that Christ is the king of all the saints and of those who confess God.[1] If, therefore, the writing of a ruler hostile to God is laden with so many and such great mysteries, how much more could a king who was a lover and patron of divine worship and was inspired and urged by the Lord, have been able **/325/** to preach those things that are of the Lord and to proclaim secrets in writing, as the prophet says? As to what fruit his proclamations and writings contained, the verse which comes after this in the order of Holy Scripture makes plain:

[1:5–6] Then rose up the leading men of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, and every one whose spirit God had stirred up to go up to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. And all who were round about aided their hands with silver and gold vessels, with goods, and with livestock, and with equipment, in addition to what they had brought along voluntarily. Through the words he proclaimed and the letters he dispatched throughout his whole kingdom, Cyrus indeed permitted, or rather commanded concerning the whole people of Israel (which consisted of twelve tribes) that those whom God was with should go up to Jerusalem to build the Lord's house. Nevertheless, it was not the whole people who wished to go up but only some of those to whom Jerusalem itself and the Lord's temple had formerly belonged, namely those from Judah and Benjamin and the priestly and levitical tribe.[2] For the remaining ten tribes had already been estranged from the Lord's temple and the

1 It was a commonplace, especially of Latin patristic commentators, to accord a special pre-eminence to the three languages used for the *titulus* of the Cross, since it is through those languages above all that the revelation of Christ was proclaimed throughout the world. Bede's comments here are closest to Augustine *Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis* 117.4 (CCSL 36:653.6–10), which Bede quotes as well in *On Luke* in discussing Luke 23:38 – see *In Luc.* 6 (404.1649–59). But cf. Isidore *Etymologiae* 9.1.2–3. The theme has been discussed by Resnick 1990.

2 Before his death, Joshua divided the Promised Land among each of the twelve tribes (see Josh. 13–22). Land was apportioned for each to inhabit except the priestly tribe of Levi (i.e. the Levites), who because of their sacerdotal functions were to dwell amidst and be supported by the other tribes (see. Josh. 18:7). The territory that included Jerusalem was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (see Josh. 18:28; Num. 18:20–28), while the tribe of Judah gained Jerusalem through David's conquest of the Jebusites (see 2 Sam. 5:6–7). Cf. below, *In Ezr.* 3.1419–22, 1460–62.

practice of devotion while under King Jeroboam,[1] and as a due reward for such great disobedience, they had been captured by the kings of the Assyrians and transported beyond the mountains of the Medes,[2] and, so they say, none of them were ever allowed to return to the homeland. Moreover, the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which possessed Jerusalem and the surrounding regions of Judea, together with the priests and Levites to whom the ministry of the temple pertained, though they themselves had imitated the sins of the ten tribes, **/350/** nonetheless never forsook their dwelling in the city of
[250] Jerusalem and the sacred rituals of the temple. Hence they were the last to be captured by the Chaldeans and the first to be permitted to return home once the Persians began to rule – and deservedly so, seeing that our Lord descended from the tribe of Judah and his mother Mary was joined by kinship to the tribe of Levi, which is why Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zechariah, is called her cousin by the angel.[3] The tribe of Benjamin had also joined itself to them in observant faith especially because the city of Jerusalem itself was in its lot[4] and so it merited to be the sharer of the mercy bestowed upon them.

It is beautifully said that the leaders of the fathers from the aforesaid tribes arose that they might go up to build the Lord's temple. For it is a duty of leaders and fathers (i.e. teachers), by working and

1 Cf. 1 Kings 11:26–14:22. After Solomon's death, the Israelite monarchy split into two rival kingdoms: the northern, consisting of the ten tribes, and the southern, composed of Judah and Benjamin. Jeroboam I ruled over the northern kingdom, establishing his headquarters north of Jerusalem at Shechem. To ensure that the ten tribes would not desire to return to the temple in Jerusalem where Judah and Benjamin had remained, he determined to provide them with places of worship in their own boundaries and for this purpose set up the two golden calves, thus leading the ten tribes into idolatry. For an overview, see Wood 1986: 255–320.

2 Cf. 2 Kings 17:4–6, 18:9–11.

3 Cf. Luke 1:36; 'cousin' = *cognata*. Though Mary's Levitical status is not explicitly mentioned in the Gospels, it can be easily inferred. In this verse she is called the 'cousin' of Elizabeth, who at Luke 1:5 is said to be of the daughters of Aaron; and Aaron, as Moses' brother, is 'of the house of Levi' (Ex. 2:1). Thus, as Bede says, through kinship ties (*iure consanguinitatis*) Mary is joined to the Levites.

4 *sorte*. The distribution of the Promised Land was decided by the casting of the 'lot' (*sors*), an oracular device made out of stones or wood used frequently in the Old Testament to determine God's will: see Bidmead 2000. On Benjamin's gaining Jerusalem by lot, see Josh. 18:28. In his earlier work *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, Bede counselled his contemporary audience to understand that the practice of using lots was no longer permissible: see *Exp. Act.* 1 (14.248–15.270).

teaching as preachers, to take up the challenge of devout labour in order to build up the mind of those in error to pursue good works by exhorting, rebuking and correcting. They are well said to have risen up in order to go up to Jerusalem, because those who refuse to take care of their own or their brother's salvation lie dead, as it were, with a weak and listless soul. They rise up, indeed, when they hear the king's proclamation, or rather when the Lord stirs up their spirits to ascend to the building of his house when, prompted by the words of the Holy Scriptures and aflame with the grace of their Creator, they shake off the torpor of their former negligence and, having seized upon a resolution for a better way of life, by making daily advances in good works they strive to reach, as though by certain steps leading upward, the heights of the virtues that are in the vision of eternal peace.[1] **/375/** Of these steps the first few are that each person keep his own life from sins by living well, the next few that he also turn his neighbours from their errors and negligence by teaching well, and the last that, after good works and teaching, he expect the joys of everlasting recompense.[2]

As for the fact that all who lived round about helped with silver and gold, goods, and livestock those who went up to build the Lord's house, we have briefly discussed above[3] how this should be understood mystically – namely, that the need of preachers should be supported by the wealth of those who are believers. The fact that their companions who are unable to build the temple assist the hands of the builders by giving them money can be rightly understood to refer to those occasions when secular men commit their children or household members to holy preachers in order to educate them for the Lord,[4] so that they can

1 Cf. *In Ezr*. 3.451–73, for further equation of 'steps' (*gradus*) and 'progress' (*profectus*). Also, one should recall here that Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

2 Cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 3.1465–79, 2047–49. The view of the Christian life as a progression through various stages is a commonplace in medieval thought and appears frequently in Bede's exegetical writings. For discussion, see Holder 1991: 150–54.

3 *In Ezr*. 1.273–92.

4 During the Middle Ages, children were commonly given by their parents to monastic houses to be reared, educated, and vowed to religious service. The practice, known as child oblation (Latin *oblatio*, 'offering'), is one that Bede himself experienced at first hand, as he tells us at *HE* 5.24 (567): 'When I was seven years of age I was, by the care of my kinsman, put into the charge of the reverend Abbot Benedict and then of Ceolfrith, to be educated'.

offer the service of their devotion to the Lord which they cannot perform themselves through those who can perform it. They give silver vessels when they give men shining with eloquence; they give gold
[251] vessels when they give men distinguished by natural ability; they give beasts of burden when they give men slower in understanding but ready to bear the light yoke and pleasant burden of the Gospel;[1] they give sheep when they give men humble and meek in spirit[2] who are accustomed to give freely to the poor from their own possessions as if from milk and wool; they give goods and various kinds of furniture when their kinsmen or lords entrust men or women distinguished by the manifold flowers of good works to holy teachers, through whom they may be consecrated to the Lord and contribute to the building of his house. For there are many who, by a natural **/400/** gift, are chaste, patient, modest, liberal, abstinent, kind, who reject both the honours and the delights of the world, who are lovers of righteousness no less than of wisdom, and who perhaps, like Cornelius,[3] persevere in prayers and almsgiving. The Apostle says of such as these that though they do not have the Law, they *do by nature those things which are of the Law*.[4] They are offered to holy preachers to be reborn in Christ or confirmed further in the faith, just as various items of furniture transported to build the Lord's house are given to the leading men of the fathers.

[1:7–8] King Cyrus also brought out the vessels of the Lord's temple that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and placed in the temple of his god. Cyrus king of the Persians released them into the charge of Mithredath son of Gazabar, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar prince of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar removes the Lord's vessels from Jerusalem[5] when any unclean spirit snatches some of the faithful from the Church and strips them of the joy of inward peace;[6] and he puts them in the temple of his god when he joins them to the fellowship of the reprobate who are the temple and city of the devil,

1 Cf. Matt. 11:30.

2 Cf. Matt. 11:29.

3 Cf. Acts 10:1–2.

4 Rom. 2:14.

5 When the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 605 BC, his armies looted the temple of its furnishings and carried the spoils back to Babylon: see 2 Kings 24:13 and 2 Chron. 36:10.

6 Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

namely the head of all evil ones, angels and men alike. But King Cyrus brings them forth and counts them out to the prince of Judah that they might be brought back to Jerusalem when our Lord, who is the heir of all things,[1] frees from Satan's power those whom he has predestined to eternal salvation and presents them to the priests of the Church that they may be reconciled through penance.[2] And it is well that it says that the vessels were counted out to the prince of Judah, because the Lord knows the number of his elect, nor does any one of his sheep perish when they confess **/425/** his great and terrible name; for Judah is interpreted as 'confession'.[3]

[1:9–11] And this is the number of them: thirty gold bowls, a thousand silver bowls, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold cups, four hundred and ten matching silver cups, and a thousand other vessels. The total of gold and silver vessels was five thousand four hundred. The various kinds of vessels represent the various persons or deeds of the faithful. *[252]* Moreover, in the Apocalypse we read that the *twenty-four ancients* had *golden bowls full of fragrances*,[4] and Scripture, by way of explanation, adds: *which are the prayers of the saints*. Consequently, the bowls, which are open and shining vessels, designate the hearts of the simple, which know no concealing of deceitful thoughts within themselves but are wont to speak out with a pure tongue the things they keep in their mind. This is why spices (i.e. prayers acceptable to God) are rightly said to be in these bowls. By contrast, the impure hearts of the reprobate are properly compared to sponges that are shadowy with blind channels. This is also why the Jews *offered* the crucified Lord *a sponge filled with vinegar*,[5] that they might represent through such an action that, when their Creator came to them in the flesh, they offered him thoughts from a deceitful heart and words that were sour and much degenerated from the very pure taste of their ancestors' utterances. On the other hand, the knives with which they used to cut up and divide

1 Cf. Heb. 1:2.

2 Bede shares Augustine's view that while all people are doomed to perdition because of Adam's sin, some are elected to salvation by the wholly inscrutable yet just judgement of God. Because these elect, while sojourning in this world, cannot hope to avoid sin completely, they must continually be reconciled to God through penance: cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1586–91 and 2.694–706. On predestination, see Bonner 1970: 46–47; on penance, see Carroll 1946: 157–76.

3 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:67.19).

4 Rev. 5:8.

5 John 19:29.

the limbs of the sacrificial victims in a suitable way so that, after everything was divided up with due observance, part was consumed in the sacred fire on the altar while part was given to the priests, part to the Levites, and part to those who were making offerings, doubtless symbolize those in the Church who are marked by the grace of discretion.[1] These people perfectly know how to discern in the salvation-bringing sacrifice **/450/** that is Christ what things should be said to everyone, what to the more perfect alone, and what, exceeding the bounds of human thought, should be given to the fire of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the knives symbolize that all who are dedicated to God through faithful service are his victims. The knives by which the limbs of the sacrifices are divided into portions should be understood typologically as the scribes learned in the kingdom of heaven[2] who, skilfully examining the merits and thoughts of their listeners, know well how to decide who they should promote to which grade of the ecclesiastical ministry. The cups (which are drinking vessels) figuratively express those who are wont to be intoxicated with a more fervent blaze[3] of inward love. Now it is said that some vessels were gold and others were silver. The gold ones signify those who glow with the greater splendour of spiritual wisdom, the silver those who by the charm of speech understand how to expound more eloquently those things which they know. Distinguishing these in turn, the Apostle says: *To some by the Spirit is given the words of wisdom, to others, the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit.*[4] But the fact that it mentions the number of the vessels, both each kind individually and

1 *discretionis sunt gratia insignes*. Called the 'mother of virtues' by St Benedict (*Regula Benedicti* 64.19, ed. Fry 282; cf. Bede *HE* 3.5 [228] and *In Cant*. 4 [323.297]), the virtue of discretion (*discretio*) was an important concept for the Western monastic tradition to which Bede belonged. Also translated as 'discernment', *discretio* basically means 'separation' or 'division' and came to stand for the ability to be able to distinguish (*discernere*) good from evil; it thus implies a kind of perceptivity in decision-making, the ability to judge and discern and to act accordingly, which is how Bede is using the term here. This idea was championed by such monastic writers as Cassian, Benedict, and Gregory the Great, whose *Pastoral Care* makes much of the term in discussing the qualities of the ideal *rector* or teacher. The prominence of *discretio* in Bede's writings is noted by Brown 1996: 1–2. For general discussion of the term, see Waaijman 1997 and Scholl 2001.

2 Cf. Matt. 13:52.

3 *flagrantia*: literally, 'burning heat', from *flagrare* 'to burn or blaze'. Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1179.

4 1 Cor. 12:8.

the total of all collectively, teaches us that the Lord keeps the sum total of his elect written down in the book of eternal remembrance – not just of those who persevere in the purity of the faith which they have accepted but also of those who, after they have gone astray, return to *[253]* the faith by regaining their senses. As a figure of these people it is aptly added:

[1:11] All these things Sheshbazzar brought with those who went up from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem. This is undoubtedly because none **/475/** of those who are predestined to life can be damned eternally, but all who belong to the Lord, even though they may seem for a time to have been taken away to Babylon (i.e. to the confusion of sins),[1] are in one way or another led back by divine foresight through the fellowship of the righteous to the peace of the Church. But the vessels that the army of the Chaldeans are said to have broken when they took them from Jerusalem and which they carried off in pieces to Babylonia[2] stand for the type of those who are seized by the victorious devil in such a way that, before they can be saved by repenting, they are taken from human affairs and dragged off to eternal punishment.

[2:1] These are the children of the province who went up from the captivity, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had transferred to Babylon. The 'children of the province' means the children of Judea, not of Babylon. For to this province belonged not only those who were deported from Judea to Babylon but also those who were born in Babylon from their stock – those who, though born in the flesh in Babylon, yet longed with all their soul for Judea and Jerusalem. Their distinguished leader Zerubbabel was a figure of these people: his name indicates that he was born in Babylon, but by his intention and his deeds he shows that he was a citizen of Jerusalem. In a higher sense, however, the children of the Church are the children of the heavenly homeland, not only those who have already been imbued with the sacraments of the Church but even those who, though wandering in error for some time (i.e. among the impious), nevertheless were preordained to life by divine election before the world began, and are to be consecrated by the mysteries of divine grace at their own due time. About these **/500/** it is aptly added:

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18).
2 Cf. 2 Kings 25:13–17; Jer. 52:17–23.

[2:1] And they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city, who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, and the remaining names of the leaders. For when, after being freed from the power of Satan those who have strayed from the faith have returned with those who have recently learned the faith to the Jerusalem of longed-for 'peace' and the Judah of devout 'confession or praise',[1] each one soon makes for his own city again and enters it, i.e. he
[254] devoutly pursues the guardianship and exercise of the virtues which divine generosity has granted to him according to the measure of faith. And it is appropriate that when he had said that in general they had returned to Jerusalem and Judah, he immediately added **everyone to his own city**, doubtless because they remained in their own cities but in such a way that everyone in general belonged to Jerusalem and Judah.[2] Let Jerusalem, therefore, stand for the universal state of the Holy Church throughout the world; let the cities belonging to Jerusalem stand for the individual virtues of the faithful whereby they are shielded from the temptations and onslaughts of evil spirits, as if by the protection of cities. The cities in which those who had come from captivity to Jerusalem and Judah dwelled can also be understood to refer to the various churches of Christ throughout the world from all of which the one Catholic Church is made, in which all who dwell individually nonetheless profess that they are the children of the Catholic Church, as it were the citizens of Jerusalem.

In preference to others, they employed Zerubbabel and Jeshua as their leaders. Of these men the first is shown in many passages of sacred history to have taken his lineage from royal stock, whereas the second is shown to have taken his lineage from priestly stock.[3] **/525/** Both designate the one and the same person of our Redeemer, in other words of the true king and high priest. For he alone is the one through whom we must come to salvation, which is why he says *No one comes*

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10; and 67.19).

2 The distinction being made here is between the particular locality in which one lives and the larger geographic area in which that locality is situated, e.g. you were born in a certain city but in general you are from the country to which that city belongs. In the sentences following, the same distinction is made with respect to the Church – the 'diverse churches throughout the world' belong to as well as constitute the 'One Universal Church' in the same way that we are all born in cities or towns that collectively make up larger countries and nations.

3 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.909–21; on Zerubbabel's and Jeshua's origins, see *In Ezr*. 1.1506–12.

to the Father except by me.[1] Whether through himself by hidden inspiration or through holy preachers by open instruction, he gathers each of the elect from the 'confusion' of this present life to the 'vision of perpetual peace' and the 'confession' of divine praise – from Babylon to Jerusalem and Judah,[2] so to speak. By his gift, this vision of peace and confession of thanks is no doubt begun in the present, but it is completed only in the life to come.

[2:2–3] The number of the men of the people of Israel: the children of Parosh two thousand one hundred and seventy-two, and so on until it concludes with a complete catalogue of the people of Israel (i.e. priests, Levites, singers, Nathinnites[3] and descendants of the servants of Solomon) as follows: **All the Nathinnites, and the children of the servants of Solomon, three hundred and seventeen.**[4] After the catalogue of leaders there follows the number of the people; after the recounted total of the people there follow in order the different ranks devoted to God. The 'people of Israel' means the tribe of Judah and Benjamin and whoever else from the other tribes had previously escaped from the hands of the Assyrians but had nonetheless been taken with them by the Babylonians and had been led away into captivity. In fact we should note that in the very text of the catalogue – and more where the same catalogue is repeated in the second part of the book, i.e. in the words of Nehemiah[5] – the names of about fifteen *[255]*

1 John 14:6.

2 For the word-play to make sense, it must be recalled that Babylon = 'confusion', that Jerusalem = 'vision of peace', and that Judah = 'confession', as Bede, following Jerome, has already explained: see above *In Ezr*. 1.189, 242, 477.

3 The word 'Nathinnites' does not designate a tribe but is a transliteration of the Hebrew *nātînîm* or Aramaic *nᵉtînîm* (literally, 'those who have been given'), meaning 'temple servants' (cf. the Septuagint's *hoi dedomenoi*: 1 Chron. 9:2). Josephus calls them *hierodouloi* ('temple slaves' – *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.5.1), and some have argued that they were originally prisoners of war who were given to the temple as slaves: see Mendelsohn 1949: 102–06. In this connection, note that at *In Ezr*. 3.548–50 Bede refers to the Nathinnites as 'inhabitants of Gibeon' who served the temple 'according to the arrangement of Joshua son of Nun', a reference, it would seem, to Joshua's forcing the Gibeonites to become temple slaves (see Josh. 9:16–27). Modern scholars, however, deny any connection between the Gibeonites and the Nathinnites, arguing that, in the context of Ezra–Nehemiah, the status of the Nathinnites is more elevated than that of slaves, as is shown by their being exempt along with priests and Levites from certain taxes (Ezra 7:24): see McKenzie 1965: 612–13 and Levine 1963: 207–08.

4 Ezra 2:58.

5 Cf. Neh. 7:7–38. As noted above (p. 1, n. 1), Bede's wording here shows that the section on Nehemiah did not at this time constitute a separate book, as it does today in

cities are inserted which, unless I am mistaken, are all found only in the tribe of Judah and Benjamin. **/550/** In this passage, then, it is probable that 'people of Israel' is to be understood as these tribes in particular along with the priests and Levites who had shared the same fate.[1] The Nathinnites, however, who are described in due sequence after the priests, Levites, singers and gatekeepers, were the equivalent in those days of those who nowadays in the Church are called subdeacons, since they assisted the duties of the Levites and received offerings in the temple from the peoples.[2] Further, the name 'descendants of the servants of Solomon' was given to the temple stewards who were responsible for repairing the sacred buildings,[3] so that whatever had been damaged might be restored again by them through the use of the sacred funds. What we have said above[4] about the vessels should be said now about the people, namely that the reason that Scripture has distinguished so scrupulously how many captives from what families had returned to their country as free men is so that from this we might be advised with how much certitude the Lord writes the sum of his elect in the book of life, records, as it were, in the register of heaven, how many souls each of the faithful have turned from error by preaching or manifesting examples of good works, and compensates those they have converted with an appropriate reward for each one.

[2:59–60] And these are the ones who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they were not able to show whether the home of their ancestors and their seed were of Israel. The descendants of Delaiah, the descendants of Tobiah, the descendants of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two. Even taken literally this passage shows the grace of God by which even in the Old Testament the Gentiles were led to salvation. For when the list of those who it was known really belonged to God's people was set out, there were added

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Protestant Bibles. Hence the material comes 'in the second part of the book, i.e. in the words of Nehemiah' (*in secunda parte libri, hoc est in verbis Neemiae*). For a recent summary of the issue, see Bogaert 2000: 9–12.

1 Cf. below *In Ezr*. 2.832–58, for another passage in which Bede is careful to clarify that this group of returnees was from Judah.

2 Isidore *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 2.10.1–2 (CCSL 113:69.1–11), and *Etymologiae* 7.12.23–24. On the association of the Levites with the ecclesiastical order of deacons, see below *In Ezr*. 1.850–62 and the accompanying note.

3 Isidore *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 2.13.1 (CCSL 113:72.6–9).

4 *In Ezr*. 1.466–71.

/575/ to them some from those who it was not known whether they were from Israel or from the proselytes.[1] The reason that their number is set forth among the children of Israel is that, even though they had not been able to show how they belonged to him on account of the long separation of their ancestors from the temple or people of God, yet because they had gone up from the captivity when they were given general freedom to do so and hastened to build God's temple along with those who were certainly descended from Israel, they were received by them as companions. For they rejoiced to consider them as brothers and friends [*notos*] on account of the love of common faith and religion, although they seemed to have held them as less well known [*cognitos*] due to the uncertainty of their carnal origin.[2] But in the spiritual sense, among the penitents who, freed from the captivity of the vices, go up to build the Lord's house either in themselves or in others, there are generally some bound by more serious sins who seem *[256]* to be so alienated from every act of devotion and chastity that absolutely none of the goodness and religion they have received from holy teachers seems to have remained in them. What else should be said about these people except that it is not possible to show whether they were born from Israel (i.e. the Holy Church) by their belief, no doubt because by sinning they have become like people who never belonged to the holy seed in any way. Yet sometimes by repenting they are corrected and turned to a better life to such an extent that their number is deservedly recorded in heaven among the true Israelites, *in whom there is no guile*.[3]

[2:61–63] And of the descendants of the priests: the descendants of Habaiah, the descendants of Hakkoz, the descendants of Barzillai, a man who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name. /600/ These searched for the written record

1 In an Old Testament context, the name 'proselyte' (Greek *proselytos* 'one who comes to a place', i.e. a stranger) means a Gentile who accepted Judaism in its entirety, undergoing the initiatory rites of circumcision, a ritual bath, and the offering of a sacrificial victim: cf. *In Ezr*. 2.669–72; *Epist. Cath*. Prol. (181.11–14); and *Exp. Act*. 2 (18.93–98). This word is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew *gēr*, 'sojourner' or 'resident alien'. Cf. *In Ezr*. 2.669–72.

2 It is possible that *cognitos* 'known' may suggest – or even be a misreading for – *cognatos* 'kindred'. Moreover, Bede's phrase *velut fratres et notos*, 'like brothers or friends' recalls the Gospel's *inter cognatos et notos*, 'among kindred and friends' (Luke 2:44).

3 John 1:47.

of their genealogy, but they could not find it and were excluded from the priesthood. And Athersata[1] **said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things, until there might arise a priest learned and perfect.** The descendants of the exiles[2] act with the same precaution towards the priests as they are reported to have acted with towards the people. For they took much trouble that it should become known without confusion who truly belonged to the people of Israel or to the priestly class, and who were suspect, or were born from undoubtedly proselyte (i.e. foreign) stock. And so they banished from the service of the altar the priests whom they suspected until their origin could become more certainly known, but nonetheless, they kept them with them in harmonious peace in the company of exiles. According to the mystical sense, however, the descendants of the priests who, coming up from the Babylonian captivity, look for the written record of their genealogies and, upon being unable to find it, are ejected from the priesthood, refers to when ministers of the altar themselves fall into such great crimes and such serious heresies that, although by repenting they can recover the salvation of their souls, they can no longer become worthy to be promoted to the sacerdotal grade which they have lost, or recover the job of preaching the Gospel or of administering the sacraments. Although they may indeed hope for eternal life among the faithful, yet they will be unable to find the written record of their grade among the perfect priests, a level which they cannot recover.

[2:64–65] The whole assembly, like one man, totalled forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, in addition to their male and female servants, who numbered seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven. Note that the grace of the primitive Church, in **/625/** which *the*

1 Athersata (*hattiršātā* in Hebrew) is not a name, as Bede appears to think, but is believed to be a title meaning 'the Governor', and is translated as such in most modern English versions.

2 *filii transmigrationis*. Bede uses this phrase to refer to those Jews whose ancestors were originally led away to captivity in Babylon and who now, years later, are returning to Jerusalem. I have thus translated it throughout as 'descendents of the exile'. In the Vulgate, the phrase *filii transmigrationis* is used to translate both the Aramaic *bᵉnē haggôlāh* (Ezra 6:16; Dan. 2:25, 5:13, 6:14) and the Hebrew *bᵉnē haggôlāh* (Ezra 4:1, 6:19, 6:20, 8:35, 10:7, 10:16); it is also employed by Jerome in his *On Obadiah – In Abdiam* 20.21 (CCSL 76:372.690).

multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul,[1] is found in this assembly of exiles as well, so much so that, even though the host was so great that it totalled nearly fifty thousand people and was moreover of *[257]* diverse rank and condition, nevertheless the whole multitude seemed to be like one man because of the same faith and love,[2] since by his gift he causes those of one mind to dwell together in his house.[3] The male and female servants of those returning from Babylon to Jerusalem represent figuratively those in the Church who by progress in an amended way of life endeavour to conquer the vices and to scale the peak of the virtues, even though they are as yet unable to discern for themselves the path of the regular life[4] but rather still need to be kept in check by the diligence of those who have preceded them in Christ and

1 Acts 4:32. Bede refers to the primitive church again at *In Ezr*. 2.656–57 and 3.973, 1199–1206. Both in the present passage and again in Book 3 (see lines 1199–1206) he appears to have in mind a three-way connection between the returnees, the primitive church, and monasticism, the three being united by their commitment to brotherhood and charity: see below, nn. 3 and 4. Earlier writers such as Eusebius, Basil the Great, Cassian and others compared monasticism to the life of apostles as described in Acts, seeing the latter as the origin of the coenobitic life: see Bartelink 2004. In his two commentaries on Acts, Bede, in treating Acts 4:32, likewise emphasizes that association: see *Exp*. *Act*. 4 (CCSL 121:27.69–73) and *Retract*. *Act*. 4 (CCSL 121:126.101–127.129). Moreover, in the *Ecclesiastical History*, he notes of Augustine and his fellow monks that, when they arrived in Kent, '…they began to imitate the way of life of the apostles and of the primitive church' – *HE* 1.26 (76). For more on Bede's view of the primitive church, see Olsen 1982; on the monastic implications of this and other passages in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, see DeGregorio 2005.

2 On this theme, cf. *De templ*. 1 (173.1067–73).

3 Cf. Ps. 68:6 (67:7), which Bede quotes again at *HE* 2.2 (136). Although there is no evidence that Bede knew it, his coupling of this verse with Acts 4:32 calls to mind the so-called Rule of St Augustine, which begins by quoting both verses to emphasize the principle of community at the heart of monastic life as Augustine envisaged it: see Augustine *Praeceptum* I.2 (ed. Verheijen. 1:417). Cf. also Augustine *Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis* 76.2 (CCSL 36:518.16–17), and Ps. 133:1 (132:1).

4 'path of regular life' = *viam vitae regularis*. The phrase, which evidently means a life conformed to the discipline of a monastic rule, confirms the monastic overtones noted earlier in this passage: see nn. 1 and 3 above. Bede's use of the word *regula* elsewhere in *On Ezra and Nehemiah* may carry similar monastic connotations: e.g. *regulari moderamine* (1.861–2); *custodia disciplinae regularis* (3.641–2); *regulari ratione* (3.784); *valuae disciplinae regularis* (3.1005–6). Compare Bede's usage at *HE* 3.24 (292) and 4.23 (408), where he applauds Ælfflæd and Hild for teaching the 'rule' (*vitae regularis*); and at *HE* 5.24 (566), where he notes his own life-long dedication to 'the observance of the rule' (*observantium disciplinae regularis*).

thus be directed towards the way of longed-for truth. There follows: **[2:65] And there were among them two hundred male and female singers.** Not only are there singers as well as gatekeepers of the temple and Nathinnites in the Levite order, but these together with female singers are also found among God's people itself, hurrying to restore the buildings of the house of God. According to the literal meaning, he calls 'singers' those who used to sing psalms in a sweet melody, something the Chronicles testify the Levites were accustomed to do at their daily sacrifices in God's temple, though it is plausible that many of the common people at that time, each of them in their own places, did this too.[1] According to the mystical meaning, however, the singers are those in the temple or among the people of God who, with a greater sweetness of soul, both keep the heavenly commandments and with frequent exhortations commend their hearers to keep them. **/650/** It is proper also that, along with the male singers, female singers should be included on account of their female sex, in which there are many people found who not only by the way they live but also by preaching enkindle the hearts of their neighbours to the praise of their Creator and, as though with the sweetness of a holy voice, assist the labour of those who build the Lord's temple.[2]

Both the title and the text of Psalm 95 agree with the service of all of these singers. For the title is *A canticle for David, when the house of God was being built after the captivity*.[3] On the literal level, this title appears to speak of the rebuilding of the temple about which the present book writes; but in the anagogical (i.e. higher) sense,[4] it

1 Cf. 1 Chron. 15:16; 16:4.

2 As Thacker 1983: 131 has noted, this passage is interesting as it shows that Bede was comfortable with the idea of women preachers. His stance here accords with his remarks elsewhere that terms such as 'priest' and 'pastor' comprise not only men in holy orders but all the faithful who live and teach well – see *Hom*. 1.7 (49.98–117) and *De templ*. 2 (194.80–94). Passages such as these appear to contradict the view of Lees and Overing 1994, who argue from Bede's treatment of Abbess Hild in the *HE* that he was troubled by the idea of women in positions of authority. Indeed, Bede mentions many holy abbesses in *HE* who were distinguished for their way of life and teaching. Anglo-Saxon women are also known to have played a major role in the evangelisation of the Continent: see Hyland 1996.

3 Ps. 96:1 (95:1).

4 *anagogico, id est altiore, sensu*. As Bede explains in *On the Tabernacle*, 'Anagogy (that is, speech leading to higher things) is that which discusses, in words either mystical or plain, future rewards and what the future life in heaven consists of' – *De tab*. 1 (25.802–4); trans. Holder 26.

suggests the construction of the Holy Church, which is made from souls freed from demonic captivity and brought back to the recognition of their Creator. During this building, each one of the elect should resound with a song of praise and confession for him 'of the strong hand', the 'desirable one'[1] – that is to say, the Lord Jesus Christ, truthfully understanding that it is not possible to do anything good without his grace. The Psalm too concurs with the title: *Sing*, it says, *to the Lord a new song: sing to the Lord, every land. Sing to the Lord, and praise his name: proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.*[2] Firstly, then, we are commanded in building the Lord's house to sing 'a new song' to the Lord himself – which is to say, both to retain his love inwardly within our heart and to show it in an outward way by keeping his commandments. And not just a few people should do this, but every land throughout which the Holy Church has spread. Next, we are instructed /**675/** to preach[3] (for in Latin this means 'to announce the good news') his salvation, namely Christ, and this not just to a select group of listeners but to all the peoples of whom the Church spread throughout the whole world is comprised – not that any one person can preach the Gospel to all nations, but we can all do this in all nations, each of us in his own time and place, and all of us are both obliged and able individually to wish for the joy of everlasting salvation for all as we say: *Praise the Lord, all you nations: praise him, all you peoples*.[4] *[258]*

[2:66–67] Their horses were six hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, their camels four hundred and thirty-five, their asses six thousand five hundred and twenty. A mule is born from an ass and a mare, a she-mule from a horse and a she-ass.[5] So with the men who went up from the captivity, the animals that assisted their journey are described as well, and the reason that their number is

1 The etymological word-play here is taken from Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:103.11), who claims that in Hebrew the name David means *fortis manus sive desiderabilis*. Bede indulges in similar word-play on David's name later in Book 3: see *In Ezr*. 3.465–66, 1685–86.

2 Ps. 96:1–3 (95:1–3).

3 The Latin verb *evangelizare*, translated here as 'preach', is derived from the Greek *evangelizesthai* which literally does mean 'to announce good news'; cf. *evangelion*, 'good news', '(reward for) good tidings'.

4 Ps. 117:1 (116:1).

5 Isidore *Etymologiae* 12.1.60; Pliny *Naturalis historia* 8.69.171.

designated in the prophetic book like that of the men is no doubt because there are many in the Church who are either slower in understanding or even carnal in spirit who nevertheless obey spiritual teachers with dutiful devotion and submit their mind's back in order to bear the burdens of fraternal necessity with humility. These people too, rescued with the rest of the elect from the confusion of enslavement to the devil, strive for the fortifications of the heavenly city. The whole number of these, like that of the more perfect, is preserved unchanged in the eternal memory of the inner witness. For this reason God is told by the person of the Holy Church universal: *Your eyes did see my imperfect being, and all shall be written in your book*;[1] and in another psalm: *You will save both men and beasts, Oh Lord.* **/700/** *Oh how have you multiplied your mercies, Oh God*; but further on concerning the more perfect, *But the children of men shall put their trust in the protection of your wings*, and so on.[2]

[259] **[2:68–69] And when they entered the Lord's temple which is in Jerusalem, some of the leading men of the fathers offered freely to the Lord's house to rebuild it on its site. According to their means they gave towards the expenses of the work forty-one thousand *solidi* of gold, five thousand *minae* of silver, and a hundred garments for the priests.** It is proof of great devotion when one freely offers to the sight of the divine majesty not merely the offerings due to it (i.e. those commanded by the Lord's Law) but, in addition, freely offers other gifts of which he received not a commandment but counsel. For a commandment is: *You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false testimony, honour your father and your mother, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself*;[3] but the freewill offering: *If you wish to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor*.[4] And what the Apostle says: *Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; but I offer counsel*;[5] and in regard to himself: *And the Lord ordained that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel. But I have used none of these things*;[6] and to the Thessalonians: *Neither did we eat any man's*

1 Ps. 139:16 (138:16).
2 Ps. 36:6–7 (35:7–8).
3 Matt. 19:18–19.
4 Matt. 19:21.
5 1 Cor. 7:25.
6 1 Cor. 9:14–15.

food without paying for it. On the contrary, in labour and in toil we worked night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right, but in order that we might give ourselves as a model for you to follow.[1] Rightly then is it reported that the leaders of the fathers freely offered gifts to rebuild God's house, **/725/** for the more that any abstain even from permissible things with the restraint that is proper to formally prohibited actions, the more effectively do they build God's Church, since all who learn of the examples of their perfection are going to be that much more afraid to descend into forbidden things to the extent that they consider that those people[2] do not always make use even of what is permissible but instead say, *All things are lawful to me, but not all things are beneficial*.[3]

Now it has been well said that **According to their means they gave towards the expenses of the work**. For this, surely, is the measure of human perfection – that each person should labour for the Lord according to his abilities and strengthen the state of the Holy Church, firstly by living in an upright way himself, and secondly by correcting his neighbours. And rightly are those among God's people who live in such a manner called the 'leading men of the fathers', doubtless because through the perfection of their own life and teaching, they rule even over those who, through their devotion to pious duty, have earned the name 'Fathers' in the Church by living more exaltedly and going beyond the general commandments of the Law. They gave gold, silver and priestly garments as voluntary offerings: in gold there is the shine of wisdom; in silver, the brilliance of eloquence; in priestly garments, works of righteousness far transcending the habits of the common people and fitting alone for hearts which are priestly and consecrated to the Lord. For *the desirable treasure rests in the mouth of the wise*,[4] and *The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried by fire*,[5] and *May your priests clothe themselves in righteousness*.[6] The leading men of the fathers offer gold, silver, and priestly garments according to their means towards the expenses of the work of the *[260]*

1 2 Thess. 3:8–9.
2 That is, the ones whose example they have recognized.
3 1 Cor. 6:12.
4 Prov. 21:20.
5 Ps. 12:6 (11:7).
6 Ps. 132:9 (131:9).

temple when holy men apply whatever wisdom, eloquence, and **/750/** good deeds they possess by utilizing them appropriately in the building up of the faithful of Christ. Now a fixed weight of gold and silver and a fixed number of priestly garments is included in Sacred History so that, in accordance with the preceding account of the number of vessels, men, and animals,[1] we might bear in mind that the Lord always knows all our thoughts, words, and actions, and repays them with a worthy reward.

Along with this, it should be noted how much the injustice of captivity and prolonged servitude profited God's people. For those who were taken prisoner in a very small number (that is, *four thousand six hundred souls* of men, as Jeremiah writes),[2] the rest having been either killed, scattered far and wide through fear of the enemy, or else perhaps left behind in the homeland through the enemy's mercy, now returned home once their number among the enemy had grown to nearly fifty thousand men. Those who were carried off into exile stripped of riches and made equal in servitude now return not only liberated but also enriched with gold, silver, garments, slaves, possessions, and livestock. Above all, those who lost their homeland on behalf of a multiplicity of false gods, so much so that the prophet rebuked them and said, *For according to the number of your cities were your gods, Oh Judah*,[3] now returned home not only rejoicing in the faith of the one true God, but also cherishing that very faith together with a single devotion of heart and soul and applying themselves to singing praises with a religious mind and tongue to such an extent that those who had formerly been known because of the diversity of their religion by the different names Israel and Judah were now because of **/775/** the unity of their devotion all called by the ancient name Israel. For in a foreign land among enemies given to idolatry, they recalled to mind the true practice of devotion which they had spurned in the Holy Land, despite the warnings uttered by the prophets and the examples of righteousness that they gave. So what is to be pondered in these events, what is to be committed to memory? Surely that those whom freedom and plenty in their own land had made careless and forgetful of God's commandments, were the very people whom *[261]* slavery and poverty in a foreign country led back to worship of their

1 *In Ezr*. 1.466–72, 559–67, 688–96.
2 Jer. 52:30.
3 Jer. 2:28.

Creator and Liberator. It is, in fact, a common occurrence that the human heart is made dissolute by wealth and freedom, but is led back to itself by hardship and poverty. Thus, what occurred once for a single people takes place on a daily basis amidst all those who repent after committing sins: those who through negligence have fallen into the temptations and snares of the devil rise again with divine help through the exercise of penance; those who were stripped of the riches of the virtues by the ancient enemy and have abandoned the society of the Church often return to her fellowship practised in greater virtues than those they had previously lost. For clearly the more they recall how seriously they went astray, the more ardent is their zeal to exert themselves in good works.[1]

[2:70] So from the people the priests and the Levites and the singers and the gatekeepers and the Nathinnites dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities. He says 'all Israel', not the ten tribes alone which were once called Israel to distinguish them from the two tribes which were called Judah,[2] but all **/800/** in general who had gone up from the captivity, whether they took their origin from Judah and Benjamin or from the other tribes. For when the ten tribes were deported to Assyria and their land was repopulated with Samaritans,[3] those who had been left behind forsook and broke all the images and began to serve the Lord wholeheartedly and to make their sacrificial offerings in the temple.[4] In this way they manifestly proved the Chronicles right in which it is written: *Therefore Josiah removed all the detestable idols from all the territories belonging to the children of Israel, and he caused all who remained in Israel to serve the Lord their God. As long as he lived, they did not draw back from the Lord, the God of their fathers*.[5] And a little earlier under the same king when the restoration of the Lord's house was being considered: *And he received*, it says, *the money*

1 Bede takes the optimistic view that the pitfalls of sin can sometimes have an advantageous effect by prompting the Christian to strive to attain a greater state of holiness. As he puts it in his commentary on James, '…one ought more to rejoice in temptations the more definitely evident it is that on those whom he loves God often places a heavier burden of temptations, that through the training of temptations they may be proven perfect in the faith' – *Epist. Cath*. (187.154–59); trans. Hurst 13. Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.850–57, 1491–1502; and 2.683–707, 1517–30.

2 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.338–59.

3 Cf. 2 Kings 17:1–24.

4 Cf. 2 Kings 23:4–14, 24.

5 2 Chron. 34:33.

which had been brought into the house of the Lord, and which the Levites who were the gatekeepers had gathered together from the people of Manasseh and Ephraim, and all the remnant of Israel, and from all Judah and Benjamin, and from the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then they gave it into the hands of those appointed to supervise the workmen in the Lord's house.[1]

Those, therefore, who remained were sent as captives to Babylonia at the same time as the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, to whom they had been joined, and were sent back together to their homeland and each one to their own cities, which, when they entered them, they had discovered were empty of farms and dwellings; for no farmer had entered those cities nor the lands of the two tribes while they were enslaved in Babylonia, as Scripture says: *If anyone had escaped from the sword he was taken to Babylon and there became a servant to the king and his sons until the king of the Persians came to power. And the word of the Lord from the mouth of Jeremiah was fulfilled, and the land*
[262] *enjoyed its sabbath rests; for all the days of* **/825/** *its desolation it kept a sabbath, until seventy years were completed.*[2] And so when this very lengthy sabbath was over, the land of Judea took back its inhabitants with the remaining Israelites. But the greater part of the ten tribes, which had been exiled by the Assyrians beyond the mountains of the Medes, never returned home; had it done so, it would not have been able to enter its cities, possessed as they were by the Samaritans. Regarding this, Jews today[3] assure themselves in a very Jewish and unfaithful manner that when their anointed one[4] comes and establishes his reign they too, along with the other people of their nation, will return to Judea and will rule over the whole world. For they fail to understand the words of the prophets, who promised the kingdom and riches of God's city Jerusalem not in a carnal sense to the one people of Judea but in a spiritual sense to all peoples in Christ, something which is now being done throughout the world. Let these few words be enough about the surface meaning of the text.[5]

1 2 Chron. 34:9–10.

2 2 Chron. 36:20–21.

3 See below, *In Ezr*. 1.1403 and the accompanying note.

4 *christo suo*: cf. *In Ezr*. 1.154–55. The Latin *christus* is for Jews a designation, not for the person Jesus of Nazareth, but for the 'anointed one' or messiah foretold by the Old Testament prophets.

5 *superficie litterae*. A technical term in Latin biblical exegesis, *superficies litterae*

According to the spiritual sense, however, the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and the Nathinnites returning from Babylon dwell in their towns and all of Israel in their cities when ministers of the holy altar and teachers and even the common people of God themselves, each of them in their own station, faithfully serve God, whether they are those who have been corrected through penance when sometimes they have defiled or lost that station by sins, or whether they are those who have recently come to the Church from the devil's kingdom and have won for themselves a good station by ministering well.[1] The Levites or children of Israel entered their cities, not only those who had previously lost these same cities when they were captured, but also those who had been born from the stock of the captives and learned that they belonged to those cities **/850/** by paternal succession. Thus also in the spiritual sense, a Levite regains his own city from which he was deported by the Chaldeans when some deacon[2] of the Holy Church with the Lord's help recovers the virtue of perfection which he had lost, seduced as he was by the devil. For instance, he who was made unworthy of the station he had received because of drunkenness, concupiscence, or pride returns once more to the same station in a more worthy state through continence, moderation, humility, and the remaining traits of a more correct life. On the other hand, a Levite who was born in Babylon comes to the land of Judea and enters his city when a person who has been reborn in Christ sheds the guilt of original sin and, after being properly instituted in the Church, guards by regular discipline[3] the station of deacon he has received. For just as he too was freed through his Redeemer's grace from Chaldean servi-

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(literally, the 'surface of the letter') is simply another denotation for the literal or historical level of meaning, from which the other senses (allegory, tropological, anagogical) derive. Hence, in *On the Song of Songs*, Bede could write, 'But since we have already drawn a few things together from the surface meaning of the text (*de superficie litterae*), let us now turn to write of the meanings that can be extracted from the allegory.' – *In Cant*. 1 (221.405–06).

1 Cf. 1 Tim. 3:13.

2 Patristic authors commonly traced the origin of the deaconate to the Old Testament Levites, aligning the ecclesiastical offices of bishop, priest, and deacon with the tripartite Judaic hierarchy of high priest, presbyter, and Levite: see, for example, Isidore *Etymologiae* 7.12.16–24. Holder 1999: 391–92, has treated the theme, noting Bede's usage in the present passage.

3 'by regular discipline' = *regulari moderamine*: cf. *In Ezr*. 1.634–35 and the accompanying note.

tude, so to speak, in the same way through the practice of the good works in which his predecessors of the same station lived he ascends to the walls, as it were, of his own city. However, all those children of Israel who were taken away as captives and never returned to their homeland but rather abandoned their cities and farms to be possessed
[263] by others, assuredly designate the errors of those who by sinning so withdraw from the Church that they never recover their senses by repenting but rather abandon the rewards that have been promised to them to be taken over by others who are worthy of them. To one of these, or rather to everyone, the Lord recommends penance, saying in the Apocalypse: *Remember from where you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first, or else I will come to you and will remove* **/875/** *your lampstand from its place, unless you do penance*.[1] On the other hand, to another who stands firm in the faith he suggests to prevent his fall: *Behold I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one may take your crown*.[2]

[3:1] And now the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in their cities; so the people gathered together as one man in Jerusalem. The seventh month, which we call October, was more than all the other months solemn with the observance of ceremonies according to the Law, and was also the time when the dedication of the temple was celebrated.[3] It was thus appropriate to the devotion of the faithful who had come up from the captivity that, as soon as they had individually entered their own cities with the livestock and money they had brought with them and there built homes suitable for themselves and their families, they should all presently gather together in Jerusalem and construct an altar there for offering holocausts to God, and this at the time of year when this temple was originally consecrated with the altar and all of its vessels and when they had been accustomed to come there every year for the day of this consecration. In a higher sense, however, the seventh month suggests the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is described as sevenfold in the prophet Isaiah and in the

1 Rev. 2:5.

2 Rev. 3:11.

3 Cf. Bede *DTR* 11 (313.24–26); also *Hom.* 2.24 (363.187–94). In Hebrew tradition the seventh month, Tishri, contained a number of important holy days and festivals, such as the Feast of Tabernacles, the Day of Trumpets, and the Day of Atonement: see Grabbe 1998: 16.

Apocalypse of Saint John.[1] We come together in Jerusalem in this month from our cities after captivity when, after the stains and errors of the vices have been washed away, and after the defences of good works have been begun, we are illuminated by the greater grace of the same Spirit and set ablaze with the love of heavenly peace, which resides in true unity; for Jerusalem, to be sure, means 'vision of peace'.[2] And it is well said that in the seventh month all of Israel gathered in Jerusalem **as one man**. **/900/** For this occurs daily in the spiritual Israel[3] when, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, all the elect throughout the world worship God with one and the same faith, and aspire with one no less equal love to the joys of everlasting peace and happiness and imitate these things, insofar as they can even in this life, by loving and being patient with one another. Moreover, it is fittingly added:

[3:2] And Jeshua son of Jozadak rose up, with his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his brethren, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, that they might offer holocausts upon it, as is written in the law of Moses the man of God. For they employed Jeshua and Zerubbabel as the masters for the work of divine worship. Both men, as we have said above,[4] fulfil one and the same figure of our Lord and Saviour – Jeshua in view of his priesthood, Zerubbabel in view of his kingship, since the former descended from priestly stock, while the other descended from royal stock. Now the true king of Israel (i.e. of all 'who see God'[5]) is our Lord. He is also the true priest *according to the order of Melchizedek*[6] – a priest because he cleanses us from our sins[7] through the sacrificial offering of his body and even *[264]*

1 Is. 11:2–3; Rev. 1:4; cf. Bede *De templ.* 2 (202.406–18).

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

3 *in spiritali Israhel*. The early Christian Church claimed to be the new or 'spiritual' Israel that replaced the old or 'carnal' Israel who had abandoned Christ. Augustine, in Book 3 of *On Christian Doctrine*, defines the spiritual Israel as '…not one people but all to whose fathers there was promise in their seed, which is Christ' – *De doctrina christiana* 3.34.47 (CCSL 32:109.71–73). Elsewhere, Bede identifies it with both the Christian people – *Hom.* 1.17 (124. 203–04) – and the Church – *In Sam.* 3 (174.1595). See further *Exp. Act.* 1 (8.66–67); *Retract. Act.* 3 (121.66–75); *In Gen.* 3 (169.953–57); and *De tab.* 1 (11.236–43).

4 *In Ezr.* 1.522–26.

5 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:75.21).

6 Ps. 110:4 (109:4).

7 Cf. Rev. 1:5.

now, after his passion and ascension, intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father;[1] a king because even in the present life he arms us for spiritual warfare and helps us to prevail and grants an everlasting kingdom in the future to those who win the battle.

Now not only Jeshua and Zerubbabel but their brethren were also in charge with them of the building of the temple, those brethren, doubtless, about whom our same king and priest said when he appeared after the glory of his resurrection to the women who were seeking him: **/925/** *Go, tell my brethren*.[2] These brethren (namely all those who are higher in the Church and who adhere more intimately to their Redeemer) build his house with him when, with his help, they strengthen the hearts of the faithful with their words and examples. And it is well that he calls the brethren of Jeshua 'priests'. For the Apostle Peter says to the whole Church: *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood*;[3] likewise John in the Apocalypse says concerning the whole Church: *Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ*.[4] For when all of the elect are members of the most high priest, when they present their own members as a living sacrifice,[5] when they give their own spirit to God as a contrite offering,[6] they themselves also are rightly called by the deserved name of 'brotherhood' and 'priesthood'.[7]

Moreover, with the great foresight of religion, the descendants of the exiles first of all built the altar of God so that, even though God's temple had not yet been founded, they could nonetheless have somewhere where they could show the devotion of their mind by offering holocausts and victims. We too perform this today in the Church in a spiritual manner when above all we place faith in our Lord's incarnation and passion in our heart and hand this faith over to our hearers that it may be received before anything else and rooted in their inmost heart, according to that saying of the Apostle which he spoke to the
[265] Corinthians still unlearned in Christ, saying: *For I resolved not to know*

1 Rom. 8:34.
2 Matt. 28:10.
3 1 Pet. 2:9.
4 Rev. 20:6.
5 Rom. 12:1.
6 Ps. 51:19 (50:19).
7 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.38–42.

anything while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.[1] On this altar, we should offer our holocausts (i.e. perfect thoughts and deeds) **/950/** since, to be sure, the votive offerings of our actions can be pleasing to God the Father only if we participate in the sacraments of our Redeemer and are enflamed by the power of his spirit, as if by the fire of the most holy altar. For 'holocaust means something wholly burnt-up'.[2] By this name they called those sacrifices and offerings from which it was commanded that nothing be left for human use but that everything be given to God and consumed in the sacred fire. Mystically, these offerings denote the way of life of those faithful who, seeking nothing of their own, devote their entire life to the servitude of the internal judge. They not only rejoice to trample down the pleasures of their own soul and body for the Lord but also to lay down the soul itself for him and can say with the apostles: *Behold, we have forsaken everything, and followed you. What then shall we have?*[3] The Lord himself said in reply to these people: *And everyone who has left home or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundred times as much and will possess everlasting life*.[4] This holocaust of a more continent and more hallowed way of life must be offered on the altar of the God of Israel because, as we have said, only through the faith of our Redeemer can our good works be acceptable to God the Father. For Diogenes and those like-minded followers of his foolish philosophy, although they had abandoned their own belongings and were living a bare and meagre way of life in the world, were not following the Lord.[5] They

1 1 Cor. 2:2.

2 Gregory *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 2.8.16 (CCSL 142:348.456–7).

3 Matt. 19:27.

4 Matt. 19:29.

5 Diogenes of Sinope (also known as Diogenes the Cynic) was one of the followers of the Cynic school of philosophy, founded in Athens by Antisthenes around 400 BC. The Cynics espoused a philosophy of moderation and self-denial and so would appear, as Bede implies here, to have shared common ground with the monks and ascetics of the early Christian period, save that they did not know Christ. Bede makes the very same point about Diogenes again in his homily for the feast of Benedict Biscop: 'For it is unquestionably foolish to follow Plato, Diogenes and certain other philosophers in trampling underfoot the riches of this life, and not to do this in order to secure eternal life, but merely to grasp after the empty praise of mortal men' – *Hom.* 1.13 (CCSL 122:88.8–12). Bede's dismissiveness here towards the secular culture of the ancient world is typical of his attitude elsewhere. Though he borrows from secular writers such as Virgil, arguing with Augustine that it is acceptable to take what is useful from pagan

did, indeed, appear to offer a holocaust but not on the altar of the God of Israel, since they kept themselves aloof from their own pleasures but did not know that they had Jesus Christ **/975/** as an advocate with the Father.[1] Fittingly it adds about this altar:

[3:3] And they set the altar of God upon its bases, because they were in fear of the peoples of the lands around them, and they offered a holocaust to the Lord upon it morning and evening. For the bases of the altar are the hearts of the elect which are prepared as it were by the tools of craftsmen to receive the mysteries of the Lord's faith by the precepts of the teachers who went before. And it is fitting that there is one altar but several bases supporting it, because *there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God*[2] but many are the hearts of the faithful which, having been taught by the single rule of truth as though they had been brought together into the same bosom, carry the burden
[266] of the heavenly mysteries with a common devotion.[3] Otherwise, anyone who entrusts the mysteries of the faith to those who have been insufficiently instructed and are not yet endeavouring to abandon their past sins is like one who places the Lord's altar on the ground without its bases, surrendering the things of heaven to minds which are still earthly. Now this accords with that passage in the Gospel where the Lord says: *Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but they put it upon a stand, that it may give light to everyone in the house*.[4] For just as the Lord is rightly called an altar since he cleanses us from our transgressions because, receiving the offerings of our prayers, he commends them to the Father, in the same way he can be not inappropriately called a lamp, since he placed the light of his eternal divinity in the vessel of the humanity that he had assumed. Furthermore, the bases are put under the altar and the lampstand is put under the lamp when all the faithful submit their own hearts and

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literature, he is always careful to warn his readers about the dangers involved. As he states in *On Samuel*: 'It is safer to seek out salutary guidance in apostolic pages than in Platonic ones' – *In Sam*. 2 (121.2218–19). Cf. *In Ezr*. 2.1589–93 and 3.2083–88. For discussion of Bede's wary attitude towards classical culture, see Carroll 1946: 41–43; Bonner 1973: 76–83; and Brown 1996: 11–14; on the monastic tone of this passage, see DeGregorio 2005.

1 1 John 2:1.

2 Eph. 4:5–6.

3 On the theme of unity in diversity in Bede's exegesis, see Holder 1991: 145–50.

4 Matt. 5:15.

bodies **/1000/** with humble determination to practise through their works what they believe.

But when it was said that they arranged the altar on its bases, it was fittingly added **because they were in fear of the peoples of the lands around them**, because simultaneously with the devout undertakings of those faithful to God, the opposition of the wicked (either spirits or men) who strive to prevent good work from being accomplished will appear. Consequently, such ones are rightly called 'peoples of the lands' to distinguish them from those who say: *But our dwelling is in heaven*.[1] Yet, however much the peoples of the lands may frighten them, it is necessary that the citizens of the heavenly city persist in the works of the virtues that they have begun, for there follows: **and they offered upon it a holocaust to the Lord morning and evening**. For we offer a holocaust to the Lord on his altar when, with the complete devotion to his faith established in our hearts, we attend to good actions. And we do this morning and evening when we clearly remember that we both have received from him the beginnings of salvation-giving intention[2] and cannot complete the good works we have begun without the help of his grace. And so we make offerings of thanks to him in all things with an ardent desire to live in a devout way.[3] Likewise, we offer a holocaust in the morning when, having received the light of spiritual understanding, we repay our Creator in our turn by living well; and we offer a holocaust in the evening when, for the sake of the eternal repose that we hope we are going to receive from him after doing good works, we burn with unending zeal. According to the literal sense, we can rightly understand that we offer a holocaust to the Lord morning and evening when we take such care at every moment to be pleasing in the sight of his divine majesty **/1025/**

1 Phil. 3:20.

2 'beginnings of salvation-giving intention' = *initia salutiferae intentionis*. Bede follows Augustine in holding that every work of virtue the Christian performs is effected, and indeed completed, by God's grace. As he states in *On I Peter*, 'For no one by dint of his own freedom can manage to be kept in good, but in everything we must seek the help of him from whom we have received the beginnings of good action if we are to bring it to completion' – *Epist. Cath.* (227.93–95); trans. Hurst 72–73. On this theme, see Carroll 1946: 140–44.

3 'to live in a devout way' = *desiderio piae conversationis*. *Conversatio* is the word translated as 'dwelling' in the quotation above from Phil. 3:20. The word is important in Benedictine monasticism, the monk taking the vow of *conversatio morum*, 'conversion of manners': see *Regula Benedicti* 58.17 (ed. Fry 268).

that, arising at daybreak, we do not proceed to attend to the necessities of human frailty before, being enflamed with the fire of divine love, we commend ourselves to the Lord with devout prayers, according to him who says, *In the morning my prayer shall come before you*,[1] and
[267] similarly, when we have completed our daily work, do not give sleep to our eyes nor slumber to our eyelids[2] before we consecrate a place to the Lord in ourselves with an even more assiduous constancy of praying,[3] according to that saying which the same prophet says: *Let my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like an evening sacrifice*.[4]

[3:4] And they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the holocaust on each individual day in due order according to the commandment: the duty of the day in its day.[5] The Feast of Tabernacles, which in the Gospel[6] is called by the Greek word *scenopegia* (i.e. the fixing of tents),[7] was a seven-day feast beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month,[8] on which the Lord commanded all the people to make tabernacles for themselves from the leaves and branches of the most beautiful wood and, leaving their homes, to stay in these tabernacles for seven days, daily pondering the

1 Ps. 88:13 (87:14).

2 Cf. Ps. 132:4–5 (131:4–5).

3 *orationum instantia*. Cf. *Regula Benedicti* prol. 4 (ed. Fry 158–59): 'First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to him most earnestly to bring it to perfection' ('In primis, ut quicquid agendum inchoas bonum, ab eo perfici instantissima oratione deposcas'). Cf. *In Ezr*. 3.466–73, 1265–66.

4 Ps. 141:2 (140:2). For Bede's views on prayer, see DeGregorio 1999: 15–39.

5 The phrase 'the duty of the day in its day' (*opus diei in die suo*) is, according to Grabbe 1998: 17, an allusion to Num. 29:12–39, which details the specific sacrifices that were to be offered on each day of the Feast. Bede reads these sacrifices tropologically by aligning them with the corporeal works of mercy: see below *In Ezr*. 1.1078–82.

6 Cf. John 7:2 and Ex. 23:16; also Isidore *Etymologiae* 6.18.9. One of ancient Israel's three great annual feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles (called the 'Feast of Ingathering' in Ex. 23:16 and the 'Feast of Booths' in Deut. 16:13–15) was associated with autumn harvest and, like Passover, served to commemorate the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness: see Jenny 2000. For the meaning of 'tabernacle' in this context, see the next note.

7 *fixio tabernaculorum*. *Tabernaculum* here means 'tent' or 'dwelling' – in the present context, particularly ones constructed from interwoven leafy branches. As part of this Feast, the practice of living in such temporary shelters was, as Bede explains, intended to commemorate the wilderness experience after the Exodus: see McKenzie 1965: 862–64.

8 Cf. Lev. 23:34–43.

decrees of the divine law and offering holocausts to the Lord in fire.[1] They were commanded to do all this, lest thanks for such a great blessing ever depart from their mind, in remembrance of the time in which they once made their exodus from Egypt and dwelt in tabernacles in the wilderness, and while Moses preached the law and the divine presence frequently appeared to him, they waited a long time for the day when they would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. **/1050/** And so as those people who had come up from Babylon were making their way to Jerusalem, since they had been inflamed by a wondrously devout love to carry out all the Lord's commandments, they took care to celebrate this feast as well, in the way in which he specifies for their assembly on the fifteenth day,[2] performing on each day of the week those things that were commanded by the law. It befits us to do the same with equal devotion in a spiritual sense. For we too went out from servitude in Egypt through the blood of a lamb that we might come to the Promised Land when, baptized into the sacrament of the Lord's passion, we shook off the heavy yoke of transgression in order that, after being adopted *into the freedom of the glory of the children of God*, we would be heirs of the kingdom of Heaven.[3] We stayed in tabernacles and tents travelling for a long time through the desert until we should come to our homeland when, renouncing in baptism not only Satan (as it were the king of Egypt, i.e. of darkness)[4] but also all his pomp and the works of this present age,[5] we promised that we should *[268]* be as pilgrims and wayfarers in this world but citizens of that other life

1 Cf. Num. 29:12–39.

2 Cf. Num. 29:12.

3 Rom. 8:21.

4 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:143.29–30).

5 An allusion to the liturgical rites surrounding the ceremony of Baptism: cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1377–86, and 2.917–24, 1400–05. Renunciation of Satan (*abrenuntiatio Satanae*) and all his works had become part of the baptismal liturgy by the early Christian centuries and is mentioned in a variety of early patristic writings as well as in the Gelasian and Roman Sacramentaries, though it is uncertain, since no liturgical evidence from early Anglo-Saxon England has survived, whether or how well Bede knew the latter. At any rate, he was evidently familiar with some form of baptismal liturgy in which the renunciation of Satan played a part. Before entering the holy font, catechumens were expected to renounce Satan and all his works as evidence of their desire to abandon their old ways and to begin their new life in Christ. For further discussion, see Warren 1912: 57; Riley 1974: 22–139; and Cubitt 1995: 135–37. On baptism in early Anglo-Saxon England specifically, see Foot 1992.

which we hope for from the Lord. In remembrance of this hope and promise we ought to dwell in tabernacles in the seventh month (that is, while the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is described as sevenfold,[1] illuminates us), to desert this world with our whole mind as if it were something foreign and barren, and to hasten with a fixed resolve to the unfading joys of paradise. And it behoves us to do this incessantly for seven days (i.e. for the whole period of our present life which is accomplished in as many days),[2] and **/1075/** on each of these seven days we ought without ceasing to offer 'a holocaust' and 'the duty of the day in its day' – namely a holocaust (that is, an entirely burnt-up offering) in regard to those things that properly pertain to divine service, such as prayers and fasting; and the duty of the day in its day in regard to those things that pertain to the service of brotherly love, such as ministering bread to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the cold, hospitality to the pilgrim, care to the sick, burial to the dead, doctrine to the erring, and comfort to the mournful.[3]

And when he said that they made **a holocaust on each individual day according to the commandment, as the day required**, he rightly interjected **in due order**, no doubt because anything in the service of either divine or brotherly love that is performed in a disorderly fashion loses the merit of its perfection. For *the honour of a king loves judgement*,[4] for whatever tasks we devoutly carry out in honour of the most high king, we certainly must distinguish through discerning judgement

1 Is. 11:2–3.

2 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.23–24, 2.726–28, and 3.1213–17. The notion that human life runs the course of seven days is explained more fully in Bede's *The Reckoning of Time*. In Chapter 10, entitled 'The Week of the World Ages', Bede draws an analogy between the seven days of the week and the Seven World Ages, in which he implies that Saturday, the seventh day or Sabbath, represents a sabbath rest of the saints in heaven, while Sunday, the day following the Sabbath, stands for a new unending eighth age in which the saved reign eternally with Christ, an idea drawn ultimately from the final chapter of Augustine's *City of God* – see Bede *DTR* 10 (310.1–312.59) and 71 (542.1–544.97); and Augustine *De civitate Dei* 22.30 (CCSL 48:865.124–866.148). Moreover, at the beginning of Chapter 66 of *The Reckoning of Time*, Bede develops the analogy between the 'ages of man' and the 'ages of the world', thus connecting, implicitly at least, the week to both the World Ages and Ages of Man: for discussion, see Wallis's commentary, pp. 280, 353–66 and 373–74.

3 This passage on good works can perhaps be read as Bede's expansion of Matt. 25:35–46 and *Regula Benedicti* 4.13–19, 53.1, and 72.8 (ed. Fry 182, 254–56, and 294), which together underpin the Christian conception of the corporeal works of mercy.

4 Ps. 99:4 (98:4)

when or to what extent we should carry them out so that we do not, by performing our righteous work in a less than orderly manner, corrupt the standard of his righteousness. Paul suggested that we ought to celebrate this Feast of Tabernacles (i.e. *scenopegia*) in a mystical way when, in the midst of his preaching, he used to make time for the art of tent-making: for he used to make *scenomata* (i.e. tents) in order to teach that he was himself an inhabitant of this world and yet a pilgrim in it as well, and to educate those whom he was instructing that they must be travelling in this life but expecting and hoping for their homeland in the life to come.[1] For when travelling or making journeys we are accustomed to use tents.[2] The same Apostle testifies that the saints do this in this life when he says: **/1100/** *While we are in the body we are travelling apart from the Lord*;[3] and to the Hebrews: *For here we do not have a lasting city but we are looking for the city that is to come*.[4] But since those who entirely turn their minds away from the world and faithfully confess that they are citizens of the homeland which is on high immediately open an entrance in themselves for all the virtues, it is rightly added:

[3:5] And after these a continual holocaust on the Kalends and on all the feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and on all in which a voluntary offering was made to God. *[269]* He calls a holocaust 'continual' that was offered morning and evening. By 'Kalends' he means the beginnings of the months, that is the appearance of the new moon from which the Hebrews always began the months inasmuch as they had no months except lunar ones.[5] Hence instead of 'Kalends' the Greeks use the better word *neomeniae*, that is, new moons. Now if the months, by reason of the thirty days by which they are fulfilled, stand for the fullness of works of light whenever, in the faith of the Holy Trinity, we carry out the precepts of the Decalogue, what else do the beginnings of the months designate, in which the moon, in order that it might give

1 Cf. Acts 18:3. Bede offers a similar comment on Paul and tent-making at *In Cant.* 4 (244.29–38).

2 Cf. *In Ezr.* 2.1080–81.

3 2 Cor. 5:6.

4 Heb. 13:14.

5 The Jewish month was heavily dependent on the phases of the moon, with the months extending from one new moon to another. For more on the Jewish month, see *DTR* 11 (312.1– 319.110), with Wallis's commentary, pp. 281–84; on the kalends, see *DTR* 13 (325.1–327.30).

light to us anew, is said to be newly kindled by the sun,[1] except the start of each good work, a start that we perceive by the grace of our Creator as though by the presence of the *sun of righteousness*?[2] To signify this divine illumination, without which we can neither begin nor complete any good thing, the Lord ordered that all the Kalends (that is, the beginnings of the months) be observed by carrying out ceremonies of animal sacrifices. Hence there is that saying of the psalmist: *Blow on your trumpet at the beginning of the month, on the special day of your* **/1125/** *feast*,[3] which is to say openly: '*Rejoice in the Lord*[4] you who are righteous, and proclaim the word of instruction to your neighbours as soon as you consider that you have been thought worthy by him to do good work in the special light of his internal inspiration through which it is proper that you be called away from the lust of this world and devote your time to divine matters in a higher way'.[5]

Fittingly, therefore, is it stated that when the Feast of Tabernacles was over, the descendants of the exiles kept making **a continual holocaust on the Kalends and on all the feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and on all in which a voluntary offering was made to God**. For after the mind has completely renounced this world once and for all, it should continually devote itself entirely to compliance with the divine will (which we have said a holocaust designates); and it should do this both at the beginning of every good action and during the devout practice of those virtues which the Lord has commanded as

1 Cf. *In Ezr*. 2.916. The idea that the moon's light is really reflected sunlight is discussed by Bede in *On the Nature of Things* – see *DNR* 20 (211.1–213.13). Jones, in his edition of the text (CCSL 123A:211), lists Pliny *Historia naturalis* 2.10.56–57 and 2.16.80 and Isidore *De natura rerum* 18.3–6 (ed. Fontaine, pp. 238–45) as Bede's sources. Furthermore, the analogy between the sun/moon and divine power/human virtue is a patristic commonplace: e.g. Ambrose *Hexameron* 4.8.32 (CSEL 32:137.18–138.20); Jerome *In Esaiam* 9.30.26 (CCSL 73:395.17–31); Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 10.3 (CCSL 38:75.1–76.61), 60.8 (CCSL 39:770.22–29) and 103.19 (CCSL 40:1516.1–22); Gregory *Moralia in Job* 34.14.25 (CCSL 143B:1750.10–22); and Isidore *De natura rerum* 18.5–6 (ed. Fontaine, pp. 242–44).

2 Mal. 4:2; cf. *In Ezr*. 2.931 and 3.1025. Throughout his writings, Bede identifies Malachi's 'sun of righteousness' as Jesus: e.g. *In Gen*. 2 (127.1938–42); *In Cant*. 3 (253.334–37); *In Hab*. (387.188–89); *De tab*. 3 (112.766–72); *De templ*. 1 (161.580–84); *Hom*. 2.15 (287.261–64).

3 Ps. 81:3 (80:4).

4 Phil. 3:1.

5 There is word-play here in Bede's use of *avocari*, 'to be called away from' and *vacare*, 'to devote time to'.

well as in those by which the pious mind, in addition to the general commandments, rejoices to serve the Lord voluntarily. On such matters the Lord himself does not give an order but offers counsel when he says: *If you wish to be perfect, go sell what you have*;[1] and when he was arguing concerning celibacy he did not give an order but only advice, saying: *The one who can accept this should accept it*.[2] Moreover, Paul too was boasting about those things which he had offered to the Lord as a voluntary service when he said: *Don't we have the right to eat and drink? Don't we have the right to take around with us a sister or wife, as do the other apostles and the brethren of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who do not have the right to do this?*,[3] and the rest **/1150/** of the passage. *[270]*

[3:6] And from the first day of the seventh month they began to offer a holocaust to the Lord. It has been said more than once that the seventh month stands for the sevenfold enlightenment of spiritual grace.[4] So now it is well said that **from the first day of the seventh month they began to offer a holocaust to the Lord,** doubtless because from the very beginning of divine inspiration, human conscience must be transformed and, as it neglects the delights of the lowest level, burn to think and do only those things which are the Lord's. Is it not true that from the first day of the seventh month (that is, from the first illumination of divine grace) they [the Apostles] were offering holocausts of virtues to the Lord? For when the Holy Spirit came upon them in tongues of fire,[5] immediately, as though transformed from what they had been before, they began to burn with new torches of a now intimate love and to preach the wonderful works of God in the tongues of all nations, and they were so dedicated through this holocaust – indeed they themselves became a holocaust – that it would have been easier for them to be killed by those who had opposing beliefs than it would have been for them to be called away from their purpose. For this reason this same seventh month is deservedly called among the Hebrews the 'New Year',[6] indicating to us by its name that it is given

1 Matt. 19:21.
2 Matt. 19:12.
3 1 Cor. 9:4–6.
4 Cf. *In Ezr.* 1.891.
5 Cf. Acts 2:3–11.
6 See *DTR* 11 (313.24–26), where Bede explains that the Jewish New Year began in September '…because then the harvest is gathered and special festivities held'; trans. Wallis 42.

to the faithful through the gift of the Holy Spirit so that they might have the strength to fulfil the new commandment of mutual love and to proclaim a new song of heavenly praise in the construction of the Lord's house. Regarding the observance of this month, the Lord mystically commanded as follows: *In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there will be for you a memorial sabbath with trumpet blasts, and it shall be called holy. You shall do no servile work on it, and you shall offer a holocaust to the Lord*.[1] **/1175/** For there will be a memorial sabbath (i.e. a rest) on the first day of this month when the mind, enflamed by divine influence, abstains from worldly enticements and exerts itself in contemplating God's will. The priests blow the trumpets when the faithful work hard to preach to their neighbours also that glow of internal sweetness which they have begun.[2] No servile work is performed on such a sabbath when, to please God, the mind keeps itself free from every pleasure and infection of sin, insofar as it is possible in this life. For sin is servile work because he who sins is surely a servant of sin;[3] and for this reason a holocaust is rightly offered to the Lord on this Sabbath, no doubt because he whose whole heart
[271] burns with the fire of heavenly love is truly made free from the servitude of sin.

As to the literal meaning, it should be noted that in the seventh month it is reported that the people met in Jerusalem and there, when they had all gathered together, that Jeshua and Zerubbabel along with their brethren built an altar and from the first day of the seventh month offered a holocaust to the Lord. One thus infers that this altar was assembled very hastily from unpolished stones and not skilfully made from wood and covered with plates of brass, as was once customary.[4] For even with a very huge crowd of builders there, the altar could not have been completed and prepared for offering a holocaust on it on one and the same day on which it was begun. For in the Book of

1 Lev. 23:24–25.

2 'which they have begun' = *quam coeperint*. It is possible that the latter could be a misspelling of *quam ceperint* 'which they have acquired'.

3 John 8:34.

4 In biblical tradition, altars are not natural objects but built structures whose construction varied from one context to another; the materials employed included earth, stone, wood, brass, and gold: see Nakhai 2000. Bede's mention of an altar made from wood and brass recalls the altar of holocaust of the Tabernacle, discussed at length in *De tab*. 2 (76.1359–84.1663).

Maccabees too it is shown that the altar was made from stones,[1] and it is mentioned there that it was profaned by pagans and after six years restored by Judas Maccabaeus: *And they took*, **/1200/** it says, *unhewn stones according to the Law, and built a new altar on the model of the previous one*.[2]

It should be noted too that the beginning of the fifth age of the world, like the beginnings of the four preceding ages, is consecrated with holocausts offered to the Lord.[3] For in the first age, the blessed protomartyr Abel, for the first time of all the elect, offered holocausts to God from the firstborn of his sheep and from their fat and consecrated the approach of the new age, at first with sacrifices of sheep and, in the end, with his own blood.[4] Noah consecrated the arrival of the second age when he offered holocausts to God from all the clean animals that the ark had contained.[5] Melchizedek, the priest of God the Most High, and the patriarch Abraham consecrated the third age, the former with bread and wine, the latter with his own son offered to God;[6] and Abraham likewise consecrated the very beginning of this age when he entered the Promised Land and there built an altar and called upon God's name.[7] King David consecrated the fourth age to the Lord by building an altar on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite and offering holocausts to God so that he could placate his wrath which he had provoked by taking a census of the people.[8] It is in this place that Abraham is said to have once offered his son, and it is well known that the altar of holocausts was later put here also when

1 1 Macc. 4:44.

2 1 Macc. 4:47.

3 The doctrine of the Six World Ages, which Bede derived from Augustine's *De civitate Dei* 22.30 (CCSL 48:865.124–866.148) and Isidore's *Etymologiae* 5.38–39, divides world history into six periods during which the Christian is to labour in order to attain rest in the seventh age when the soul is separated from the body: see *In Ezr*. 3.951–55 and 1986–91. The division corresponds to God's creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh. The doctrine appears throughout Bede's writings, receiving its most sustained treatment in *DTR* 66–71 (463.1 –544.98). See Wallis's commentary, pp. 353–75, and the treatments of Jones 1969–70: 191–98 and Siniscalco 1978.

4 Cf. Gen. 4:4–8.

5 Cf. Gen. 8:20.

6 Cf. Gen. 14:18; 22:1–13.

7 Cf. Gen. 12:7, 13:4. I have omitted from Bede's sentence the word *accepta* (see line 1213), which is difficult to translate in the present context and may in fact be a corruption.

8 2 Sam. 24:18–25 and 1 Chron. 21:18–28; cf. *De templ.* 1 (159.504–160.529).

the temple was built by Solomon.[1] So now the high priest Jeshua son of Jozadak and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel dedicated the beginning of the fifth age when they built an altar in the same place and offered holocausts to God, as soon as they had thrown off the yoke of long captivity and returned to Jerusalem and henceforth endeavoured to reconcile themselves to the Lord with a continual holocaust daily.
[272] **/1225/** All these events prefigured him who, in the sixth age, would come in the flesh and redeem the whole world by means of the sacrifice of his own flesh and blood. Thus, after the altar had been built and the holocausts offered to God, Scripture continues which says:

[3:6] But the foundation of the temple of God was not yet laid. Typologically, in this passage, the founding of God's temple holds a figure of those who, recently converted to the faith, prepare a place or abode in their heart and body for the Lord, as the Apostle says: *Do you not know that your limbs are the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you*;[2] and again: *That by faith Christ dwells in your hearts*.[3] Accordingly, those who when freed from captivity had come up to Jerusalem had indeed arranged to build a temple, which, by their labour, they eventually achieved, but first they built an altar and commended themselves to the Lord with daily holocausts, so that in this way being made more pure they might deserve to start the work of building the temple. Likewise with respect to the spiritual edifice[4] too it is necessary in every way that whoever has decided to teach others should first teach himself, and that he who aims to instruct his neighbours to fear and love God should first make himself worthy for the office of teacher by serving God more eagerly, lest by chance he should hear from the Apostle: *You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?*[5] This is why the Apostle says in regard to himself: *But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, in case when preaching to others I myself should be found wanting*.[6] Consequently, it is fitting that the descendants of the exiles **/1250/** are found to have offered God no victims or

1 Cf. 2 Chron. 3:1.

2 1 Cor. 6:19.

3 Eph. 3:17.

4 *spiritali aedificatione*. Bede may be thinking here of Peter's *domus spiritalis* (1 Pet. 2:5). For Bede's comments on this verse, see *Epist. Cath.* (234.52–235.104).

5 Rom. 2:21. Cf. *Epist. Cath.* (202.14–17).

6 1 Cor. 9:27.

sacrifices other than holocausts (that is, wholly burnt-up offerings), because whoever lives an evil life yet desires to teach others to refrain from illicit acts must give himself over entirely to his Creator by living well and refraining even from things that are permissible, so that he might not only, by the merit of good action, more copiously obtain heavenly help in preaching, but also, by the example of that same good work, encourage his hearers to follow more effectively what he teaches.

The fact that they build an altar and offer holocausts to God but are not yet building the temple can also be interpreted mystically, as referring to those who, recently converted to the Lord, immediately upon acknowledging their faith in him, burn so much in loving him with their whole heart that they are already fit to be numbered among the perfect, even though they have not been given the time or opportunity to undertake and accomplish the good things that they desire. The blessed Abraham offered a holocaust of this kind to the Lord even though a temple had not yet been built when he showed himself to be already perfect in faith even before he could perform any works of faith, as Scripture explains: *Abraham put his trust in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*.[1] When, therefore, he added the fullness of good works to his perfect faith, offering his own son Isaac on the altar,[2] it was as if he offered more perfect holocausts to God than even after the temple was built, doubtless because the individual acts or stages of dutiful devotion are just like the courses of polished stones by means of which we build a home or dwelling pleasing to God in our heart. But how the descendants of the exiles came to build the temple after they constructed an altar and offered holocausts to God is shown in what follows. *[273]*

[3:7] And /1275/ they gave money to the *latomi* and to the *cementarii*, and also food and drink and oil to the Sidonians and Tyrians, to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa. *Latomi* are hewers of stone.[3] Hence in the Book of Chronicles it is written: *And* David *gave orders that all the resident aliens of the land of Israel should assemble, and from among them he appointed latomi to cut stones*.[4] *Cementarii* are those who make cement from gypsum and limestone for bonding

1 Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3.
2 Cf. Gen. 22:1–13.
3 Cf. *De templ.* 1 (152.212–18).
4 1 Chron. 22:2.

stones together. Thus for *latomi* and *cementarii* another translation has 'stonecutters' (*caesores lapidum*) and 'builders' (*fabros*).[1] The devout industry of the people should be noted, for they were either buying materials for building the temple or hiring workmen, in no way sparing their own resources that were necessary for them and which they themselves were living on. Now Joppa is a coastal city in Palestine about forty miles away from Jerusalem,[2] whereas Sidon and Tyre were most noble cities of Phoenicia in the vicinity of Mount Lebanon.[3] And so, procuring the assistance of these people, the descendants of the exiles asked for cedar logs from Lebanon to be cut for them and for these to be transported by boats over the sea to Joppa, from where they might in turn be carried over land to Jerusalem for the work of the temple. It is obvious that this was carried out according to the same plan as when the temple was first built. On that occasion Solomon, through his royal power, obtained without any effort whatever he wanted for that work from his friend King Hiram.[4] On this occasion, by contrast, the exiles, who were going back to their homeland after the passing of many years, had to buy all the materials that their longed-for work required, since they did not have the power of a kingdom.

But **/1300/** in the spiritual sense the *latomi*, in building the house of God, are those who by teaching or admonishing educate the hearts of their neighbours,[5] whom they fit, so to speak, to the stones round about by squaring them up when they teach them to stand firmly in place among the partakers of his grace. 'For no matter which way you turn
[274] it, a square will be stable'.[6] The mind of the elect also, as long as it

1 'another translation' = *alia translatio*. This is the first of a series of comments which confirm that Bede consulted more than one version of Ezra–Nehemiah; comparable statements occur at *In Ezr*. 2.205, 1505, 1759 and 3.251–52, 1350. The claim of Denter 1962: 99 that *alia translatio* here means 'another explanation' rather than a separate translation altogether, is mistaken, for the Vercelli manuscript – the only complete extant Old Latin manuscript of Esdras B – has *et dederunt pecuniam caesoribus lapidum…* (fol. 109r, col. 1). Bede, however, does not use the designation *vetus translatio*, as he does later when he cites a known Old Latin reading: see *In Ezr*. 3.252. Bede's versions of Ezra–Nehemiah are discussed above, pp. xvii–xxi.

2 Jerome *De situ locorum* (PL 23:906C).

3 Pliny *Naturalis historia* 5.17.76–77.

4 1 Kings 5:1–10; cf. *De templ*. 1 (148.61–150.127).

5 Cf. *De templ*. 1 (152.212–18).

6 Augustine *De civitate Dei* 15.26 (CCSL 48:494.26); also Gregory *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 2.9.5 (CCSL 142:359.155–62). Cf. *De templ*. 1 (154.304–05; 167.794–95); *In Gen*. 2 (105.1147).

remains unmoved amidst all the circumstances of the world whether adverse or prosperous, shows that it contains within it the squared figure, so to speak, of unconquered virtue. In this sense, Noah's ark too is described as having been made from squared logs,[1] for the ark fitted together from logs also was a figure of the same Church that the temple made from stone symbolizes, and the tabernacle constructed of planks and hangings represented this Church too.[2] The *cementarii* in the Lord's house are the same holy preachers who, whenever they join together with the bond of love those whom they educate through good works, bind, as it were, the squared and polished stones together with cement so that they do not depart from their place, saying: *Be prudent and watchful in prayers*, *above all have a constant mutual love for each other*.[3] And the Apostle Paul, when teaching us that we ought to have *the bowels of mercy, kindness, humility, modesty, patience*, and other virtues of this kind which are like the stones of the heavenly edifice, immediately added: *But above all these things have love, which is the bond of perfection*.[4]

But the men of Sidon and Tyre who were cutting the cedar logs from Lebanon for the construction of the temple also figuratively denote the same holy preachers who, with the axe of God's word, cut down from the state of their former way of life men **/1325/** once eminent and illustrious in the glory of this world, so that when they have been laid low for their own good and as it were have had the corrupting moisture of their inborn disposition dried out of them, they can straighten them out from all the twistedness of the vices and raise them on high to adorn or fortify the Holy Church.[5] In this respect, it is typologically said in a psalm entitled 'at the finishing of the tabernacle': *The voice of the Lord who breaks the cedars*.[6] For the voice of the Lord indeed breaks the cedars that the tabernacle might be brought to completion when through heavenly inspiration the hearts of the proud are laid low[7] so that, when these also have been set aright, the number of the Holy Church may be completed. Hence it is well that the name

1 Cf. Gen. 6:14.
2 Cf. Ex. 26:1–15.
3 1 Pet. 4:7–8.
4 Col. 3:12–14.
5 Cf. Bede *De templ.* 1 (149.84–91).
6 Ps. 29:5 (28:5).
7 Cf. Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 28.5 (CCSL 38:170.1–2).

Sidonians is said to mean 'hunters' and Tyrians 'hemmed in'.[1] For holy preachers are indeed hunters[2] when they constrain the wayward and erring minds of the wicked with the nets of faith[3] in order to subject them to Christ,[4] as he himself says: *Come, follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men*;[5] these preachers are also 'hemmed in' because in the world they have tribulation, even though they remain confident that the Lord has overcome the world.[6] Consequently the *latomi* and *cementarii* preparing stones and cement and the Sidonians and Tyrians transporting cedar logs from Lebanon for the work of the
[275] temple, suggest holy preachers who by instructing educate the minds of their listeners for the fellowship of the Church.

The leading men of the fathers, namely Jeshua, Zerubbabel and their brethren, give money to these *latomi* and *cementarii* to make them more willing to work when those teachers who have preceded them in time and are superior in merit and erudition with Christ's authority either show to those who preach the word the examples of their own virtues **/1350/** or produce plentiful pages of holy writings so that, strengthened by their exhortations or promises, they might grow less weary in their heavenly labour.[7] They give food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and Tyrians that they might transport the cedar logs from Lebanon over the sea to Joppa when they commend spiritual gifts – among which the greatest is love[8] – to these same teachers for

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:148.12; 149.27). The word *coangustiati*, both here at line 1335 and below at 1339, is presumably a misprint for *coangustati*: see Appendix 1, and cf. *In Ezr*. 3.2029.

2 *venatores*: cf. Jer. 16:16.

3 *retibus fidei*. This phrase, which Bede repeats in his *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, *On Luke*, and *Homilies*, is a patristic commonplace, deriving ultimately from Augustine but found in Gregory and others as well: see Augustine *De utilitate ieiunii* 11 (CCSL 46:239.334–240.353) and *De civitate Dei* 22.5 (CCSL 48:810.20–26); Gregory *Homiliae in evangelia* 2.24.4 (CCSL 141:199.72–75); and Apponius *In Canticum Canticorum expositio* 4 (CCSL 19:89.16–21).

4 Cf. Phil. 3:21; also Eph. 5:24.

5 Matt. 4:19.

6 Cf. John 16:33.

7 Bede has in mind here not ordinary preachers expounding the Bible, but patristic authors such as Augustine and Gregory the Great generously producing copious amounts of holy writings which are useful to their successors. He is thinking, in other words, about the 'excellent works of the Fathers' (*eximia patrum opera*) to which he refers below at *In Ezr*. 1.1470.

8 1 Cor. 13:13.

them to emulate, in order that they might be fit for preaching; or else when our Lord, whom we have shown is symbolized by Jeshua and Zerubbabel together,[1] imparts spiritual gifts to those same ministers of his word whereby they are illumined inwardly and made stronger for combating the ostentation and foolish wisdom of the proud by preaching.

How food, drink and oil symbolize the inner refreshment of our mind does not need to be taught to anyone who has properly learnt that saying of the psalmist who sings to the Lord: *You have prepared a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me. You have anointed my head with oil; and your cup which overflows, how excellent it is!*[2] Accordingly, money is given to the *latomi* and the *cementarii* and food, drink, and oil to the cutters of logs that they might prepare the materials to build the Lord's house when an abundance of virtues is divinely conferred upon preachers of the truth so that, aided by these, they might have the means to correct the hearts of the wicked and make them fit to obtain heavenly goods. They transport the logs which they have cut down to the sea not in order to sink them in it but to carry them over it to Joppa (which means 'beauty')[3] when these same teachers warn their hearers who have been called to the faith about the temptations of the world which they shall meet but which are to be overcome through faith,[4] so that first **/1375/** the wild waves of vices or wicked works must be endured and only then can they reach the very beautiful walls and harbour of the virtues. The fact that the logs for building the temple are transported over the sea to Joppa can also be understood in this way, namely that we must first renounce the devil – whom the prophet calls a 'serpent, the king of everything in the waters',[5] which is to say, of the ungodly, whose dwelling is not in the heavens but in the sea (that is, in the fluctuations of this restless world) – we must renounce all his pomp and works[6] and only then arrive at the beauty of the faith, by which we confess the Holy Trinity, the one *[276]*

1 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.909–21.

2 Ps. 23:5 (22:5).

3 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:124.10).

4 Cf. John 16:33.

5 Ps. 74:13 (73:13); Rev. 12:9.

6 Another reference to the *abrenuntiatio Satanae*, the renunciation of the devil and his pomp expected of the catechumen during the rite of baptism, on which see above, *In Ezr*. 1.1061–67 and the accompanying note.

and the true God, the dispensation of the Lord's incarnation, the unity of the Holy Church, the remission of sins, and the resurrection of the body.[1] Hence it is appropriate that in this city Peter raised Tabitha, a women devoted to God, from death,[2] doubtless because in the perfection of this faith all the Church in general is raised from the death of sins through baptism; and also when after baptism we again incur death by sinning, we must come to life again through this same faith by repenting and be returned once more to the fellowship of the faithful through the reconciliation of priests of the Church.[3]

[3:8] But in the second year of their arrival at the temple of God in Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua son of Jozadak, together with the rest of their brethren, the priests and the Levites, and all that had come to Jerusalem from the captivity, made a beginning. They appointed Levites from twenty years old and above to hasten forward the work of the Lord. It says they came to the temple of God not because **/1400/** they found the temple already built, since, to be sure, it was said earlier that it did not yet have foundations. Rather, 'to the temple of God' means to the place of God's temple – to the work by which they desired to rebuild the temple. And so modern Jews[4] who habitually claim that not the temple walls but only the roof was destroyed by the Chaldeans are mistaken, since Ezra plainly writes that the descendants of the exiles rebuilt the temple from its foundations. However, since it was said above[5] that they came to Jerusalem in the seventh month, and here it is added that **in the second year of their arrival** they began the work

1 A further allusion to the rites surrounding baptism, namely the 'giving back' of the Creed (*redditio symboli*). Among the preparations for baptism was the so-called 'handing over' of the creed (*traditio symboli*; mentioned at *In Ezr*. 2.1409) wherein the bishop formally delivered the creed by expounding it to the candidates, who then affirmed their faith in its decrees by reciting it back to him before receiving the sacrament. 'The theory', Kelly explains, 'was that the creed was a secret formula which could not be written down but must be memorized by the faithful'. For more on this, see Kelly 1950: 30–36, from which this quote is taken (p. 32).

2 Acts 9:36–41.

3 On the theme of penance after baptism, cf. *In Ezr*. 2.694–707 and 3.794–801.

4 I have been unable to identify the *moderni Iudaei* Bede mentions here. Since obviously Bede did not know any Jews himself, the reference must be either to some Jewish author, such as Josephus, or to some patristic writer who reported on the views of contemporary Jews. But I have been unable to turn up a specific source.

5 Cf. Ezra 3:2.

of the temple **in the second month**, it is clear that for seven months they prepared the stones, cement, timber, and other necessary materials, but when the eighth month began they started to press on at last with their longed-for work; for there were six months in the first year and the seventh in the following. Any learned person will very easily find a great mystery in this. For seven pertains to the sabbath, on which day the Lord either rested from all his works after he created the earth,[1] or when he redeemed the world through his passion and rested in the tomb, eight to the first day after the sabbath[2] on which he rose from the dead; seven looks to the hope of our sabbath rest after death, eight to the joy of our everlasting happiness after resurrection. Therefore, because all the work of the elect, who are God's temple and house,[3] both begins and is completed through the grace of the Holy Spirit and is accomplished with a complete regard and aspiration for future repose and immortality, rightly from the seventh month do the temple builders, after offering holocausts to God, **/1425/** begin to *[277]* prepare the materials for building and, having prepared the expenses for seven months, undertake the work itself in the eighth. No other number is at all discovered in the preparation of such a great work than that one which figuratively denotes either the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit,[4] by which we are aided as we work, or the repose of our souls or the resurrection of our bodies, which we hope for[5] when we do good works.

But the meaning of the period of forty-six years during which the temple was built, as even the Gospel text testifies,[6] will be explained

1 Cf. Gen. 2:2.

2 Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1.

3 Cf. 1 Cor. 3:17.

4 Cf. Is. 11:2–3.

5 Reading *speramus* for *superamus*: see Appendix 1.

6 Cf. John 2:20. The reference to the temple in this verse ('…forty-six years was this temple in building…') is usually thought by modern scholars to refer to the construction of Herod's temple, but Bede believed that it referred to the original construction after the return from Babylon, as he expressly states in Book 2 (see *In Ezr.* 2.479–86). This opinion is repeated in his homilies: 'As for their stating that the temple was built in forty-six years, they meant not its first but its second building. For Solomon, the first [builder], finished the temple very rapidly in seven years… It was destroyed by the Chaldeans, but after seventy years it began to be rebuilt… But the descendants of those who were deported were unable to finish the work… before forty-six years [had passed] on account of the resistance of the neighbouring nations.' – *Hom.* 2.1 (189.182–91); trans. Martin and Hurst 2:8. Cf. *Hom.* 2.24 (363.197–203). Bede, however, was mistaken on

in the appropriate place.[1] The great devotion of that entire people which we also should zealously imitate is revealed when not only the elders, namely Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other priests and Levites, but all the people as well who had come up from the captivity to Jerusalem from the oldest to the youngest appointed the Levites who were to hasten forward the Lord's work. They were rejoicing that they had returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon, and as much as they detested the proud city's idols and degradations from which they had escaped, they desired equally to see the beauty of the city consecrated to the Lord at which they had merited to arrive; inasmuch as they loathed the temples of idols among which they had lived for too long, they desired all the more that the temple of their Creator, the destruction of which they had lamented and from which they had long been exiled as captives, be restored as quickly as possible. For in the same way today too, not only do bishops and priests have a duty to build the congregation of the faithful (namely, God's house) by teaching, and, by taking counsel, to appoint teachers for them able diligently to fulfil the most holy work of the word, but it is also necessary that the people themselves, **/1450/** called from the captivity of the vices to the 'vision of true peace',[2] should request the ministry of the word from those who know how to proclaim it. The reason that these ministers of the word (i.e. the Levites) are said to have been appointed from twenty years old and above is doubtless that those who are to be preferred to preach God's word to the people are those who can not only reveal the Decalogue of the Law through the practice of good works as an example to their hearers, but also keep it unsullied in the sight of their Creator through chastity and integrity of the heart. Nor should we doubt that the state of the Church only makes favourable progress in places where not only do the bishops, duly maintaining their status, ordain teachers of the truth in an orthodox manner to educate the people, but also the people themselves, by diligently hearing and obeying their words, importune the teachers provided for them not to cease from speaking. But alas, it pleases the sloth of our

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two counts, for (1) the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC and the Jews began rebuilding it in 538 BC, i.e. only 49 years later; and (2) the temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius, 515 BC, so the rebuilding took only 23 years.

1 See below *In Ezr.* 2.465–86.

2 Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

times and injures both old and young – hindering the former from preaching the word, the latter from hearing it, and both groups from putting it into practice – that we ponder less carefully than we should on how bitter was the enslavement to the devil from which we have been rescued or on how great a celebration we have been called to in the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of us all,[1] of which we have already received a pledge in the Church of the present time.[2] But let us study the excellent works of the Fathers to make us the more ashamed of the inadequacy of our action.[3] It continues: *[278]*

[3:9] Then Jeshua and his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, and the sons of Judah, as one man came and took charge of the workmen in the temple of the Lord, along with the descendents of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren, /1475/ the Levites. In this passage he means by Jeshua not the high priest son of Jozadak but one of the Levites concerning whom it was said earlier that they were appointed from twenty years and above to hasten forward the work of the Lord.[4] Of these there were Kadmiel and the sons of Henadad, who are likewise said to have taken charge of the work enjoined upon them with their sons and brethren. In fact, in the catalogue of the people of Israel above, they are the first of the Levites to be mentioned by name after the priests: **the Levites, the sons of Jeshua and of Kadmiel, the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four.**[5] It is thus implicit in these two passages that they were the leaders and patriarchs of the Levites of that time. The descendants of Judah are justly put in the midst of the Levites since together with them they have taken on the

1 Gal. 4:26.

2 This is the second passage in *On Ezra and Nehemiah* that strongly echoes the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*. Along with eliminating clerical avarice, the *Letter* pointed to the need to supplement the lack of preachers and teachers whose job it was to see to the spiritual needs of the faithful. To that end, here as in the *Letter*, Bede urged that bishops take the responsibility to ordain priests and educate teachers 'who may preach the word of God and consecrate the holy mysteries in every small village, and above all perform the holy rites of baptism wherever the opportunity arises' – *Epist. Ecg.* 5 (408); trans. McClure and Collins 345. These same concerns resurface later in the commentary: cf. *In Ezr.* 2.619–26. For comment, see Thacker 1992: 152–60 and DeGregorio 1999: 113–18. On the overlap between *On Ezra and Nehemiah* and the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*, see Introduction pp. xxxi–xxxiii and DeGregorio 2004: 6–20.

3 Cf. Gregory *Homiliae in evangelia* 1.17.10 (CCSL 141:124.197–9).

4 This is evidently the Jeshua in Ezra 2:40 who is mentioned first among the few Levites in the list of returned exiles: see Eskenazi 1992: 770.

5 Ezra 2:40.

task of building the Lord's temple, and they are recalled to have stood **as one man** because of the same unity of their devotion. For here is that kind of virtue which, as we have said earlier,[1] we should always imitate, namely that not only all the orders dedicated to God but also the shared devotion of all the people should build their Holy Church, each according to their own capacity.

Also, we should note and very frequently remind ourselves how much good the evil of captivity brought to the people, for when they were freed from it, they are all shown to have attended to heavenly devotions with greater determination than they had ever before. But today too, it has been beneficial for many who had lived negligently in the peace of the Church to have suddenly gone astray and fallen into some sins, provided that after their fall they were raised up by repenting and began to serve the Lord more vigilantly; and these lazy and idle persons who seemed to live in innocence have been warned through ruin befalling them to prepare to arm themselves more carefully **/1500/** against all the attacks of the ancient enemy, so that those who had sinned by not caring even for their own life may later on, along with raising themselves up, devote care to their brethren's salvation also. The whole population of those who were returning from Babylon to Jerusalem, therefore, were responsible for restoring the temple but the Levites and the descendants of Judah above all, on
[279] account of both the sacerdotal and the regal status of the Holy Church. For the regal and priestly tribes above all build[2] the temple because, no doubt, all who educate the hearts of the faithful by teaching and living well belong to the body of the eternal king and priest, namely our Lord and Saviour.[3] Hence the leaders of the work also drew their lineage from each tribe, Jeshua from the priestly, and Zerubbabel from the royal.

[3:10–11] And when the *cementarii* had laid the foundations of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their vestments with trumpets, and the Levites, the descendants of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise God by the hands of David king of Israel. And they sang hymns together, and praise to the Lord: 'Because he is good, for his mercy endures towards Israel for ever'. And all the people cried out with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the

1 See above, *In Ezr*. 1.1433–38.
2 Reading *aedificant* for *aedificat*: see Appendix I.
3 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.38–42.

temple of the Lord had been laid. The great devotion of all the various persons is shown when, after the foundations of the Lord's temple were laid, not only the priests and Levites but all the people, each according to their own grade, praised the Lord for his mercy – the priests, dressed in holy vestments, resounding with their trumpets, as they had formerly done when the temple was still standing, and arousing the heart of the people to the sweetness of heavenly praise; **/1525/** the Levites singing hymns to the Lord together while resonantly clashing their cymbals; the people showing the affection of their hearts in praising the Lord with a collective shout. The Levites praised the Lord **by the hands of David**, whether on the instruments which he himself made or by singing psalms which he himself composed or, as the Chronicles attest,[1] because David made Asaph and his brothers the chief of those who were to confess to the Lord when the ark was put in place, about whom it is said that his *sons* were *under* his *hand*, *prophesying under the king's direction*.[2] Rightly, therefore, it should be understood on this occasion too when the sons of Asaph were praising and confessing the Lord, they did this 'by the hands of David' – that is, according to the arrangement he made.

According to the mystical sense, however, after the foundations of the Lord's temple are laid by the *cementarii* and the priests stand in their vestments with their trumpets when, after sinners have been turned from error and the foundations of faith and love of Christ have been laid in their hearts, all the leaders of the churches who listen rejoice with them, and decorating themselves also more zealously with good works, they blow the trumpets of salutary doctrine so that, by the example of their virtues as well as by the encouragement of their words, they aid the good works undertaken either by those who have recently come to the grace of Christ by repenting, or those who have recently turned others to the grace of Christ by teaching. The Levites too stand up to praise God with their cymbals when ministers of the *[280]* second rank also serve their Creator with devout actions as an example for recent converts, and do so in the sweetness of mutual love. For the cymbals which strike each other in turn to make a noise very fittingly denote the works of love whereby the saints stir each other to the praise **/1550/** of their Creator. They also praise him **by the hand of**

1 1 Chron. 16:5, 7.
2 1 Chron. 25:2.

David king of Israel when they make an effort to consider carefully and to imitate as far as they can those works of the Lord and Saviour himself that he performed in the flesh.

[3:12] But many of the priests and the Levites as well as the leading men of the fathers, and older people who had seen the first temple, loudly wept when the foundation of this temple too was laid before their eyes, and many of them shouted aloud for joy. Of those who had seen the first temple, some were uttering cries of weeping, others of joy when the foundation of this temple too was laid before their eyes – of joy, indeed, because the temple of the Lord that had been destroyed had now begun to be restored; of weeping because they were distressed when they realized what a difference there was between the poverty of the undertaking of that time and the former most magnificent power of Solomon whereby the original temple was founded. They rejoiced greatly because they had been freed from captivity and had received the authority to restore the temple, but they wept loudly because they knew that the first temple, whose size and beauty they could in no way equal, had been destroyed on account of their wickedness. For the prophet's words, *The glory of this new house will be greater than that of the first*,[1] pertain not to the greatness or decoration of the house but to the act of building itself, because the fact that the few surviving captives were able to accomplish such a great undertaking even as their enemies were opposing them was a greater and more obvious miracle of divine power than that a very rich king who had no adversaries at all but rather the very powerful and wealthy king of Tyre **/1575/** as a collaborator,[2] did this with most accomplished craftsmen, just as he desired. So too, the glory of that most recent house will be greater than the first because the worshippers in the first house preached to the peoples the writings of the Old Testament, namely the Law and the Prophets, whereas in the second house Christ and the apostles spread the good news of the grace of the New Testament and coming of the kingdom of Heaven.

But in the rebuilding of the spiritual temple also, tears and joy simultaneously arise for the leaders. For holy teachers indeed rejoice in the salvation of those who repent, and they lament that they have ever perpetuated acts worthy of repentance and have not always stood firm

1 Hag. 2:9.

2 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1290–99; *De templ*. 1 (148.61–127).

in their Creator's will; those who by repenting have risen up from the death of the soul also exult in their own salvation, and they weep that they have at any time lost the life of the soul by sinning. Recent converts also rejoice that they have been gathered by the grace of their Redeemer, and they weep that they had perished along with all humankind in their first parent and that, after God's temple (namely the state of their body and immortal soul)[1] had been destroyed by their enemies, they had been, so to speak, deported to Babylon, that is, to the 'confusion' of present exile.[2] But since the jealousy of the wicked thrives in proportion to the growing progress of the righteous, and among the gains of the devout there will never be lacking the temptations of the wicked, who either by falsely making a show of good or by openly doing evil try to injure the holy, fittingly is it added: *[281]*

[4:1–2] But the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple to the Lord God of Israel. And they approached Zerubbabel and the leading men of the fathers and said to them: 'Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do: behold we /1600/ have been sacrificing to him since the days of King Esarhaddon king of Assyria,[3] who brought us here'. The story is well-known. By the enemies of Judah and Benjamin he means the Samaritans whom the king of the Assyrians, when the ten tribes had been captured, transported from various peoples of the Gentiles into their cities and lands; they later accepted God's law and observed it to a degree and yet continued to be slaves to the same idols as before. Therefore, because they despised the true worshippers of God, they promised to help them with their work so that, having been received into their fellowship, they might be able to cause them loss. Now it is readily obvious to anyone that such peoples figuratively stand for false brethren, that is, heretics and the bad catholics.[4] They are the **enemies**

1 Cf. *In Ezr.* 2.487–96.

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18).

3 Esarhaddon, king of Assyria from 681 to 669 BC, by whom, it is alleged, the 'adversaries of Judah and Benjamin' were resettled in Palestine. But according to Myers 1965: 35 nothing certain is known of such a resettlement in the time of this king.

4 The difference between heretics and bad catholics is glossed by Augustine: 'This is the difference between heretics and bad catholics: heretics believe what is false, whereas bad catholics, though believing the truth, do not live as they believe' – *Quaestiones XVII in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 11.1 (PL 35:1367). See also Augustine *Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis* 34.10 (CCSL 36:316.10–16).

of Judah, that is, of the 'confession' and 'praise' which the Church offers in this life to the Lord through right faith and works worthy of faith.[1] They are also the **enemies of Benjamin** (that is, of the 'child of the right hand'),[2] since they separate those who listen to them from the lot of faithful people who will receive blessing and an eternal kingdom at the right hand of the judge in the life to come.[3] Therefore, such ones say to Zerubbabel and the leading men of the fathers, **Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do**, when heretics pretend that the authority to preach is divided equally between themselves and catholics, claiming that they have and love one and the same purity with those of true faith and work in order that they might receive the power to teach and, in the midst of the good seed[4] from which the Apostle Paul received the name *spermologos* (i.e. 'word-sower'),[5] sow the weeds of hidden doctrine. Certain men at the council of Nicaea
[282] acted in just this manner: **/1625/** they subscribed to the true faith along with the catholic Fathers but not with a catholic mind in order that the more intimately they mixed themselves with the faithful, the easier it would be for them to make a place for receiving the Arian treachery.[6] So too, at the Council of Palestine Pelagius denounced by utterance and writing but not in mind the heresy by which he most sharply impugned God's grace, lest he should himself be anathematized by catholic priests and lose his position as a teacher in the Church and, with it, the opportunity to sow his error.[7]

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:67.19).

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.24).

3 Cf. Matt. 25:34.

4 Cf. Matt. 13:24–25.

5 Cf. Acts 17:18.

6 Arius (*c.* 260–336), a priest in Alexandria, whose teachings gave raise to the Christological heresy that the Son's divinity was not equal to that of the Father's. Arius reasoned that since the Son was said to be derived from the Father, the Son would have to be less perfect than He. Consequently he held that the Son was neither fully divine nor fully human but somehow occupied a position between these. Arius's views were condemned in 325 at the Council of Nicaea, whose creed explicitly confronted the Arian position by reaffirming the co-equality of Son and Father. Arius's teachings, however, were not completely vanquished by Nicaea, and in the fifth and sixth centuries his ideas spread across Europe and, as Bede reports at *HE* 1.8 (35), 'corrupted the whole world and even infected this island, sundered so far from the rest of mankind, with the poison of its error'. Bede mentions the Arians again at *In Ezr*. 1.1713–14.

7 Pelagius (*c.* 350–*c.* 425) was a British monk who denied the doctrine of Original

Behold, they say, **we have sacrificed victims to him, since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here**. You have made sacrifices but unclean ones because you have not renounced idols. *For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? And what harmony is there between Christ and Belial?*[1] For you have entered the land of the children of Israel, not led by Jeshua, nor placed under the rule of the people of Jerusalem, but brought by the faithless king, by the enemy of God's people, into his land, not in order to serve the Lord there but rather that same hostile king. In exactly the same way, heretics and false catholics, when they assail the peace of the Church by living or teaching in a perverse fashion, are absolute outcasts from the kingdom of the people of Jerusalem and belong rather to the doomed lot of the Gentiles whose sins they do not abandon; or, to put it more plainly, such men enter the territory of the Holy Church not through the Lord Jesus' leadership but through the devil's, who is expressed figuratively by Esarhaddon king of Assyria. For how else except by the devil's instigation does it happen that someone receives the sacraments of the Church not in order that he himself might be consecrated to God through them and so be healed, but in order that he might corrupt others who have been consecrated to God by means of his association with them and so be more thoroughly damned? **/1650/** This is just what Simon Magus did. He received baptism in the Church not out of zeal for his own salvation but so that he might discern the affairs of the Church more certainly through close association. He made this clear in the outcome, since the Church which[2] he was unable to disturb in the guise of a false brother, he threw into confusion with greatest

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Sin, holding that man is free of his own will to choose to do good or evil. His teachings were famously and rigorously challenged by Augustine of Hippo, who took Pelagius's teachings to mean that man does not need God's grace to be saved. Although eventually condemned in the West, Pelagius was acquitted of heresy in 415 at the Council of Palestine, the event to which Bede refers here. At *HE* 1.17 (54–58), Bede tells of Pelagianism's spread throughout Britain and its subsequent defeat by the orthodox Gaulish bishop Germanus of Auxerre (d. 437), who was summoned by the people to combat the heresy. Cf. Bede *DTR* 66 (518.1630–39). For a range of opinions on the British origins of the heresy, see Myres 1960; Liebeschuetz 1967; and Markus 1986. Bede mentions Pelagius again in Book 2: see *In Ezr*. 2.586–88.

1 2 Cor. 6:14–15.

2 Reading *quam* for *quae*: see Appendix 1.

bitterness in the guise of an open enemy.[1] There follows:

[4:3] And Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the leading men of the fathers of Israel said to them: 'It is not for you and for us that we should build a house to our God, but we alone will build to the Lord our God'. It is not for heretics to build the house of the Lord, which is the Church, from which they are proved to be strangers. Rather, it is only for those who, adhering to Christ the true king and priest, deserve to be called 'leading men of the fathers' because of their devout care towards those who yearn 'to see God', which is the meaning of the word 'Israel'.[2]

[4:4] It happened therefore that the people of the land disturbed the hands of the people of Judah, and hindered them in building. Rightly does he call those who were trying to hinder the workers of truth and
[283] impede the work of the Church **the people of the land**, whereas those who were seeking to build for their Lord God with a uncorrupted mind (that is, to convert the minds and mouths of all those whom they could to do his will and seek his glory) he calls **the people of Judah** (i.e. 'he who confesses and glorifies').[3] Would that we did not know how often heretics, not just in individual cities but in entire regions as well, have impeded the doctrine of true confession either by wrongful instruction or even by violent threats. For – to pass over the teacher of the Gentiles who was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea[4] and restrained his tongue from the duty **/1675/** of building God's house due to the persecution of the Jews – let us consider the blessed Athanasius, exiled for many years from his homeland by the attacks of the heretics who

1 Simon Magus was the Samaritan sorcerer who was converted by Philip and later rebuked by Peter for his offer to buy spiritual power from the Apostles (see Acts 8:9–24). Bede's mention of Simon here, however, in the midst of a discussion of heresy, reflects early patristic commentary: the Fathers of the second and third centuries regarded Simon as the first heretic 'from whom all sorts of heresies derive their origin', to quote Irenaeus – *Adversus haereses* 1.23.2; cf. Hippolytus, *Philosophoumena* 6.7–20, and Eusebius *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.13.6, who calls Simon 'the prime author of every heresy'. For a review of these early patristic traditions, see Ferreiro 1996: 149–52. Further, as Martin has noted, Bede's brief treatment of Simon in his earlier work *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* shows that he made use of the Pseudo-Clementine literature (in Rufinus's Latin version), the chief source of the legendary history of Simon Magus – see *Exp. Act.* 8 (39.8–15), along with Martin's translation, p. 79.

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:75.21–22).

3 Cf. Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:67.19).

4 St Paul: see Acts 24:27.

pursued him;[1] Ambrose, besieged in his own city;[2] Hilary, banished[3] into exile;[4] Eusebius, who suffered martyrdom;[5] the many bishops in Africa who had their tongues cut out and were expelled from their province;[6] and many others who were afflicted with a variety of punishments or put to death – all these left the house of God which they had built to profanation by the peoples of the land (that is, by men who were seeking their own ends *not the things which are of Jesus Christ*)[7] until at a time foreordained by divine providence there were again

1 Bishop of Alexandria from 328 until his death in 373, Athanasius was exiled from his see in 335 by an imperial synod chiefly for refusing to agree that the heretic Arius should be re-admitted to the Church. He returned to Alexandria in 337 but was exiled again in 339, 356, 363 and 366, enduring a total of nearly sixteen years in exile: see Kannengiesser 1998. Bede's knowledge of Athanasius's plight against the Arians is probably drawn from Jerome *Chronicon* 234.16–235.4, which Bede reproduces in *The Reckoning of Time*: see *DTR* 66 (510.1430–32).

2 Ambrose (339–397), Bishop of Milan. His staunch opposition to Arianism brought him into conflict with the Emperor Valentinian II's mother Justina, who supported the Arians. In 386, Ambrose blocked her attempt to gain a basilica in Milan for the Arians, famously declaring that 'The emperor is indeed within the Church, not above the Church': see Swift 1998. Bede knew the story from the Greek church historian Eusebius (d. 339), whose *Historia ecclesiastica* had in the early fifth century been expanded and translated into Latin by Rufinus of Aquileia; the details above concerning Ambrose indeed come from Rufinus's expansion of the work: see Rufinus, trans. of Eusebius *Historia ecclesiastica* 11.15 (GCS 9.2:1020.18–1021.15).

3 Reading *relegatus* for *religatus*: see Appendix 1.

4 Hilary (*c.* 315–*c.* 367) became Bishop of Poitiers in 353 but three years later was banished to the East for refusing to condemn Athanasius's attack of the Arians. The fact that he preached, wrote and suffered in exile earned him the title 'Athanasius of the West': see Clark 1998. Bede makes similar mention of Hilary in *The Reckoning of Time*: see Bede *DTR* 66 (510.1440–42). There as well as here, his main source is Jerome *Chronicon* 240.11–14; 241.17–19.

5 Eusebius of Vercelli (*c.* 283–371), cleric at Rome and later Bishop of Vercelli. Widely known as a champion of orthodoxy, he upheld the decisions of Nicaea and condemned the Arians. At the Council of Milan in 355, he refused to sign a document condemning Athanasius and as a result was exiled first to Scythopolis and later to the Thebaid. He returned to Vercelli in 363 and there assisted Hilary of Poitiers in suppressing Arianism in the Western Church. According to Jerome, Eusebius died of natural causes during the reign of Valens (*De viris illustribus* 96, ed. Siamake 250); but Bede evidently knew another tradition, for his Martyrology records the saint enduring martyrdom under the Arian Emperor Constantius: see Lienhard 1998. For Bede's entry, see *Mart*., Aug 1st (ed. Dubois and Renaud 140).

6 Gregory *Dialogi* 3.32.1 (SC 260:390.1–13).

7 Phil. 2:21.

sufficient resources for the rebuilding of the same house by wise architects after the captivity – i.e. until an opportunity was given to catholic Fathers to restore the Church after heresies had been detected and overcome.

[4:5] And they bribed counsellors against them, to frustrate their plan throughout the days of Cyrus king of Persians, and until the reign of Darius king of the Persians. The distinction of the words should be noted because he says that they bribed counsellors for a certain price to go against the temple builders so that their plan would be frustrated. However, he does not say that their plan had actually been frustrated or that they ceased from their work until the letter of accusation was written to Artaxerxes, at whose command, as Scripture reports, **they prevented them by force**. For there it is written: **Then the work of the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it remained suspended down to the second year of the reign of Darius king of the Persians**.[1] Consequently, it can be inferred that during the whole of Cyrus's reign, when the work was begun, they were pressing on with that work although more slowly than was just, but when he died they were not merely impeded by wicked plans but **/1700/** were prevented from working through open attack. For while Cyrus – who had commanded that the work be carried out – was still alive, the enemies did not dare to oppose his edicts through open contention even though they did so by hidden suggestion and counsel. The allegorical meaning, however, *[284]* is quite plain: that heretics assail the Church whenever the opportunity is favourable. At times they attack through the counsels of wicked teachings, at others through the fiercer battle of swords, and sometimes they are not even afraid to harass the Church through the support of Gentile rulers. For they hinder the hands of the people of Judah when they keep the Church in its weaker members from works of devout practice; they seek to frustrate the plan to work when they endeavour to inhibit their minds from even the very intention of good action; they accuse them to kings when with the help of earthly rulers too they seek protection against the Church. How much this harms the faith became clearer than daylight during the time of the Arian treachery.

[4:6–7] And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and

1 Ezra 4:23–24.

Jerusalem. And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, and the rest that were in their council wrote to Artaxerxes king of the Persians, and so on. Josephus believes that this Artaxerxes, who upon receiving the letter of accusation from the Samaritans forbade that Jerusalem and the temple be rebuilt, is Cyrus's son Cambyses, who after the thirty-year reign of his father himself ruled for eight years.[1] After him, the Magi ruled for one year and they were succeeded by Darius son of Hystaspes,[2] during whose second year, in which he authorized the rebuilding of the temple, **/1725/** the angel interceding on behalf of the people said through the prophet Zechariah: *Oh Lord of hosts, how long will you withhold your mercy from Jerusalem and from the cities of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?*[3] Perhaps the reason that no mention is made of whether Ahasuerus, to whom a letter of accusation is likewise said to have been sent, wrote back or responded in any way is that he either died[4] the very year he began to rule and left the authority to rule and look into these matters to Artaxerxes; or, being a contemporary[5] of Artaxerxes but of lesser power, so to speak, he allowed him to deal with and decide on them.

[4:11–12] This is the copy of the letter which they sent to him: 'To Artaxerxes the king, your servants, who are on this side of the river, send greeting. Be it known to the king, that the Jews, who came up from you to us, have come to Jerusalem, a rebellious and most wicked city, which they are building, setting up its ramparts and repairing the

1 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.2. Unaware of the modern critical view that the whole of Ezra 4:6–23 is likely a chronological digression (see Myers 1965: 34 and Japhet 1994: 192–93), Bede must have been puzzled by the mention of Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes at this point. For he knew from Jerome's chronicle that the first few rulers of the Persian empire were Cyrus, Cambyses, some magi, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, and that the temple was begun under Cyrus and completed under Darius: see *In Ezr.* 2.465–73 and *DTR* 66 (484.647–486.733). Yet the verses above clearly imply that Artaxerxes ruled earlier than Darius. Bede solved this problem by adopting Josephus's view that the Artaxerxes mentioned here was not Xerxes' successor but another name for Cambyses. As for Ahasuerus, whereas modern authorities identify him with Xerxes I (see Blenkinsopp 1988: 111), Bede evidently thought he was a minor ruler, too unimportant to be included in his list of Persian kings: see below *In Ezr.* 1.1728–34.

2 That is, Darius I, king of the Persians from 522–485 BC.

3 Zech. 1:12.

4 The word *decedens*, here translated as 'died', could also mean 'retired'.

5 Reading *contemporaneus quidem* for *contemporaneus quidam*: see Appendix 1.

walls'. Artaxerxes, who is being urged and who, after being persuaded, ordered that Jerusalem should not be rebuilt, is assuredly a figure either of any of the Gentile rulers who was an enemy and persecutor of the Church, or of the ancient enemy himself, the adversary of all good things. The Jews who were being accused to the king represent men of the Church; the Samaritans who were accusing them represent
[285] heretics, as is always the case. So in a phrase appropriate to themselves they call Jerusalem **a rebellious and most wicked city**. For such do heretics judge the catholic unity which they oppose. And it is indeed 'rebellious', and it repairs the ramparts and the walls of true faith with the stones of heavenly testimonies against the darts of errors which assail them, **/1750/** about which Isaiah says: *And salvation shall possess your walls, and praise your gates*.[1] But it can only be called 'most wicked' by those who completely reject the opinion of the best of the elect. In this connection, we should note that, from this time, the people of God began to be known by the name of 'Jews', because those who first came up from the captivity, restored Jerusalem's city walls and the work of the temple, and, once the enemies who had hold over the nearby places had been overcome, again took possession of the province which had been emptied of inhabitants, were mostly from the tribe of Judah.[2]

[4:13] And now be it known to the king that if that city is rebuilt and its walls repaired, they will not pay tribute, tax, or yearly revenues, and this harm will reach even as far as the kings. Give thanks to God that the truth about the city of the Lord (which is the Church) is admitted even by the city's enemies – namely, that if it be rebuilt after the captivity and the city walls be raised up from living stones (i.e. from holy souls) against the pride of this world, its citizens (i.e. the nations of elect) will no longer pay the tribute of wicked servitude to evil spirits by sinning. Rather, the act of building devotion[3] will do harm to the princes of the *power of this air*[4] so long as more and more of those who

1 Is. 60:18.

2 The words 'Hebrews' and 'Jews' may seem to be used interchangeably in the foregoing, but as Bede points out here, the people known as the Hebrews did not properly become known as Jews until the dominant tribe of Judah was re-established in the land of Judah (or *Iudaea*, 'Judea' as the Romans called it) after the Babylonian Exile – an event recorded in Ezra–Nehemiah.

3 'the act of building devotion' = *aedificatio pietatis*. The noun *aedificatio* denotes a process of building; it thus differs from *aedificium*, i.e. the thing built.

4 Eph. 2:2.

were born into the servitude of the devil's kingdom because of the guilt of the first transgression are freed daily from his kingdom through the cleansing of baptism. By *the grace of God* working *through Jesus Christ our Lord*,[1] they no longer give the enemy what is not owed to him, but from now on they pay their Creator the just tax of service which they owe, and to the one from whom they have received them, the Giver of gifts, they give back, both by living well and by giving thanks, the yearly revenues of their first fruits and tithes, which come into being **/1775/** through the beginning and completion of good works.[2]

[4:14–15] Therefore, mindful of the salt which we have eaten in the palace,[3] and because we count it a crime to see the king wronged, we have sent word to inform the king, so that you may search in the annals of your fathers. You will discover written in these histories and will know that that city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and they have stirred up wars in it since ancient times. The Samaritans eat the salt in the palace when heretics teach people the taste of worldly philosophy, the charm of the art of rhetoric, and the cunning of the art of dialectic. These people count it a crime to see the king wronged when they cannot endure it if any people try to wage war against the devil's kingdom by means of devout faith and action; they fear for wars to be provoked in the Church lest her defenders vanquish their heresies and fallacies together with the dogmas of the heathen, doubtless with that One leading the way who says: *I came not to bring peace but the sword*;[4] and again: *I came to set fire to the earth, and what else do I wish but that it burn!*[5] – the sword, that is to say, of his word to fell adversaries, and the fire of love to set fire to the hearts of his people[6] and burn up all the arms and shields of the opposing sect. *[286]*

1 Rom. 7:25; cf. 1 Cor. 15:57.

2 There is a reference here to Ex. 23:14-17, which treats the three great Hebrew festivals of Passover, Harvest, and Ingathering. First fruits were presented to God at the second of these (that is, at the *beginning* of the harvest) and tithes at the third (that is, at the *completion* of the harvest). Accordingly, Bede uses them here to represent the 'beginning' (*inchoationem*) and 'completion' (*perfectionem*) of good works.

3 'have eaten the salt of the palace', i.e. have been in the pay of the court and hence are subservient to the king. Salt was often used to seal covenants and thus implies loyalty: see Breneman 1993: 103.

4 Matt. 10:34.

5 Luke 12:49.

6 Reading *accendens* for *accedens*: see Appendix 1.

[4:16] We let the king know that if that city is rebuilt and its walls repaired, you shall have no possession on this side of the river. By 'river' he means the Euphrates, within which Syria is situated. This with good reason suggests the stream of holy baptism, either because it is one of the four rivers which, rising from one spring in Paradise, **/1800/** irrigate the whole world,[1] doubtless as a figure of the four evangelists who, inspired by the one fount of life (i.e. the Lord Saviour), preach with a harmonious voice the washing of salvation to all the people; or because the Euphrates is interpreted as 'fertile'[2] a word which very fittingly applies to that sacrament by which the world is washed and sanctified and is wont to produce a harvest of souls thirty-fold, sixty-fold, and a hundred-fold for God.[3] Therefore, the king of the Persians, which means 'those who tempt',[4] seeks a possession on the other side of the river when the old enemy, by stirring up the incursions of temptations, tries to infiltrate the territory of the Church and to subjugate under himself even those who have been redeemed by the holy font. The Samaritans assist him when heretics, waging war on the Church, fight on behalf of the devil's kingdom and say like ones who mourn **that if that city is rebuilt and the walls repaired**[5] through the true faith and devout deeds of the righteous, he can have no possession and place on this side of the river, which is to say, in the hearts of those who have already been reborn in God through baptism. For in fact even those who do not understand the true faith realize that light and darkness, wickedness and righteousness, Christ and Belial, cannot be master of the one and the same mind.[6]

[4:17–21] The king sent word to Rehum Beelteem[7] **and Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their associates who resided in Samaria, and to the others beyond the river, saying 'Greetings and peace. The accusation which you sent to us has been read clearly in my presence',** and
[287] the rest until it says, **'Now**, **therefore, hear my decision that you are to prohibit those men and that city is not to be built'.** The literal sense is evident, and the **/1825/** allegorical too, that the impious king (namely

1 Cf. Gen. 2:14.
2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:160.17).
3 Cf. Matt. 13:8.
4 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:129.18).
5 Ezra 4:13.
6 Cf. 2 Cor. 6:14–15.
7 'Beelteem' is not in fact a name but an Aramaic word meaning 'commander'.

the ancient enemy) very willingly supports the wishes of those who persecute the Church and prevent it from being built. The enemies of Jerusalem dwell in Samaria (which means 'guard')[1] not because those who are shown to oppose 'the vision of true peace'[2] with an obstinate mind can in any way guard the precepts of faith and truth, but because they boast that the guardianship of the virtues belongs to themselves when they assail the ramparts of peace through heresy.

[4:23–24] Therefore a copy of the decree of King Artaxerxes was read in the presence of Rehum Beelteem, Shimshai the scribe, and their counsellors. And they went away with all haste to the Jews in Jerusalem and prohibited them by force. Then the work of the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it remained suspended down to the second year of the reign of Darius king of the Persians. The sequence of the history is clear. The enemies of the people of God were at first impeding the holy work through persecution, then were trying to defeat their well-intentioned plan by means of their own wicked plans, and yet they were still not strong enough to divert them entirely from the work of God's house until, supported by royal aid, they were able to obstruct them with public authority. The fraudulence of those who made the accusation should be noted, because they were complaining that those who were working on the house of God were building a city against the kingdom of the Persians, and when the king gave orders that the city was not to be built, as soon as they received the authority of the royal decree, they themselves, with harmful zeal, stood in the way of the temple being built, despite the fact that neither had they themselves made any accusation about the construction of the temple but only of the city, nor had the king prohibited anything other than **/1850/** the city from being constructed.

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:148.4).

2 Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

BOOK TWO

[288] **[5:1–2] Now the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, assisting them.** These matters have been written down in more detail in the books of these prophets – namely, with what words they either themselves rebuked the indolence of those who were too negligent towards the work of the temple or by promising God's help urged them to undertake the work, and with what devotion by their exhortation Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and all the people prepared themselves for the task of building the house of the Lord.[1] And indeed the prophet Haggai begins in this way: *In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, saying, Say to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and to Jesus (Jeshua) the high priest son of Jozadak: 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts: This people says the time has not yet come to build the Lord's house'. And the word of the Lord came to be in the hand of Haggai the prophet, saying: 'Is it a time for you to be living in panelled houses, while this house lies abandoned?'*[2] And a little further on: *And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the governor of Judah son of Shealtiel, and the spirit of Jesus (Jeshua) son of Jozadak the high priest, and the spirit of all the rest of the people; and*

1 At the end of Book 1, the work on the temple is said to have stopped due to strong opposition to the rebuilding activity (see Ezra 4:1–5, 24). During this period of inactivity, the Jewish people were urged to return to their work by Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets of the post-captivity period who preached during the second year of Darius I. Curiously, however, neither biblical book mentions the opposition to the rebuilding; rather Haggai cites the people's laziness as the reason for the halt (see Hag. 1:3–11). According to Holmgren 1987: 37, a probable explanation is that, by Darius's second year, the opposition had gradually ceased, and that Haggai was convinced that the problem was not opposition from without but the unwilling hearts of the people themselves.

2 Hag. 1:1–4.

they entered and began the work on the house of the Lord of Hosts their God on the twenty-fourth day of the month in the sixth month, in the **/25/** *second year of King Darius*.[1] And in the following lines that we mentioned above: '*The glory of this latest house will be greater than the first,' says the Lord of Hosts*.[2] Likewise, Zechariah begins thus: *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, the prophet*.[3] From this title it becomes clearer in what sense Ezra calls this prophet the 'son of Iddo', namely that he was Iddo's grandson; moreover, we should understand that Iddo himself was a noble prophet, so that Zechariah, who was outstanding among the prophets, could properly be called his 'son'.[4] In this context we should note how spirited these prophets were to have ordered the temple to be built, despite the edict of so great a king and despite the Samaritans and all the peoples around them who were obstructing the building of the temple. 'Zerubbabel also, and Jesus (Jeshua), and the people who were with them are shown to have been of no less faith to have obeyed the prophets who were urging them more than the command of the king who was prohibiting them'.[5]

But since in this book we have repeatedly said concerning Zerubbabel and Jeshua (or Jesus, for it is one and the same name)[6] *[289]* how by birth and deed they signify the Lord Saviour, the king and most high priest, it seems fitting to explain how their very names signify him too. Zerubbabel, therefore, means 'born in Babylon' or the 'teacher of Babylon';[7] Shealtiel 'my petition is God';[8] Jesus or Joshua 'Saviour';[9] and Jozadak 'the Lord is just'.[10] And indeed Jesus (Jeshua), like Joshua son of Nun, sounds manifestly like the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence both, the one from the long sojourn in the desert, the other from the longer **/50/** enslavement of the captivity, led the people into the

1 Hag. 1:14–2:1.

2 Hag. 2:10; cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1568–69.

3 Zech. 1:1.

4 The designation 'son of the prophets' was used to indicate not a blood relationship but rather a recognition of their shared prophetic vocation: see 1 Kings 20:35 and 2 Kings 2:3, 7 and the comments of Schmitt 1992.

5 Jerome *In Aggaeum* Prol. (CCSL 76A:713.28).

6 The names Joshua/Jeshua/Jesus are all variants of the Hebrew *yᵉhôšûa*ʿ or *yēšûa*ʿ, which means 'Yahweh is salvation'.

7 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:125.26–27).

8 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:138.6).

9 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:76.28 and 104.29).

10 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:124.23).

Promised Land as a figure of the true Jesus who, rescuing his elect from all evils, leads them to the promised joys of the heavenly kingdom.[1] He is the son of Jozadak (i.e. 'of the Lord who is just'), for about him it is sung in a psalm: *The Lord who is just will cut the necks of sinners: may all who hate Zion be confounded and turned back*.[2] The fact that Zerubbabel is called 'born in Babylon' is relevant to him historically because he was born there, though he was from the stock of David who was born in Bethlehem; allegorically, however, this refers to the Lord who, in order to deliver the world from the 'confusion of errors' deigned to be born and to live in Babylon (i.e. in the confusion of this world)[3] at the appointed time. He is also called the 'teacher of Babylon', not because he teaches those things which are of Babylon (i.e. of this world), but because those whom[4] he finds oppressed by the yoke of the Babylonians he educates in the grace of liberty and leads those whom he has educated to the walls of the celestial homeland. His father is Shealtiel, i.e. 'my petition is God', to whom he himself says in a psalm: *Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance*.[5] But since when calling upon him who is the God of each one of the faithful and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ one seeks nothing from him other than God himself, it is possible rightly to call him by the name 'Shealtiel', i.e. 'my petition is God', according to that saying of the psalmist: *For what remains for me in heaven? And besides you what have I desired on earth?*,[6] and so on until it says, *But it is good for me to adhere to God*.[7] Our petition, therefore, is God since from him we seek him alone, that we might deserve to enjoy an everlasting vision of him.

[5:3–5] At that very time Tattenai, who was governor beyond /75/ the river, and Shethar-Bozenai and their counsellors came to them and

1 The 'both' refers to Joshua son of Nun and Jeshua the high priest. The former, following Moses' death, led the Israelites in conquering the Promised Land (see Josh. 1–12), while the latter, as we have seen from Bede's exposition, helped Zerubbabel in leading the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem.

2 Ps. 129:4–5 (128:4–5). Reading *revertantur* for *revereantur*: see Appendix 1. Note, however, that *revereantur* is the reading in some manuscripts of the LXX version in the Vulgate.

3 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18).

4 Reading *quos* for *quod*: see Appendix 1.

5 Ps. 2:8.

6 Ps. 73:25 (72:25).

7 Ps. 73:28 (72:28).

spoke to them as follows, 'Who counselled you to build this house and restore these walls?' At which we answered them with the names of the men who were responsible for that building. But the eye of their *[290]*
God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were unable to stop them. The literal meaning is clear, namely that the leaders of the Jews, strengthened by the prophets' words, could not be hindered by the harrying of the enemies from the holy work, from which they had ceased out of fear of the enemies when the prophets still remained silent. This occurs in the same way in the Holy Church now when those who have been held back by the attacks of wicked people or spirits and have remained for a while rather lax with respect to good deeds are suddenly set straight by the words either of faithful teachers or of the divine Scriptures and begin to burn so greatly for righteous pursuits that they cannot be overcome by any wiles of temptations or be called back from what they intended to do. One rightly asks, however, in what sense it is said, **At which we answered them**, as though the one who wrote it was himself present at the time, in view of the fact that Ezra, who is said to have written this book, was apparently not in Jerusalem at this time but came long afterwards when Artaxerxes was ruling.[1] So either he actually was there while the temple was being built and went back to Babylon when it was finished to lead back more of the children of Israel to Jerusalem; or at any rate, even if he was not yet there when the temple was being built, he nevertheless united himself to those who were doing the building because he reckoned as his own all that was done to his brethren or **/100/** whatever they themselves did. Similarly, through the harmony of this same brotherhood the Apostle associates himself in a certain sense with those saints who will come into being at the end of the world: *We*, he says, *who are still alive, who are left at the coming of our Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep*.[2]

[5:5–6] And it was agreed that the matter should be referred to Darius, and that they should then give satisfaction concerning that accusation.

1 The reference here is not to the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:11–12 who opposed the construction of the temple and whom Bede identified with Cambyses at *In Ezr*. 1.1719–22; rather it is to Artaxerxes I, son and successor of Xerxes I who ruled from 465–425 BC: cf. *DTR* 66 (486.713–20). Throughout Book 2, Bede associates this Artaxerxes with Christian kings because of his active support of the rebuilding project: e.g. below *In Ezr*. 2.976–79 and 1231–35.

2 1 Thess. 4:15.

This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the river, and Shethar-Bozenai and his counsellors the Arphasachites, who were on the other side of the river, sent to King Darius, and the rest up until the end of the letter where it says: **Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let him search in the royal archive which is in Babylon, whether it was decreed by King Cyrus that the house of God should be built in Jerusalem, and let the king send us his decision in this matter.**[1] This letter that Tattenai writes to Darius is very different from the one Rehum and Shimshai wrote to Artaxerxes. That letter was filled with accusation of the people of Jerusalem, this one with praise not only of the people but of Almighty God. Indeed it begins as follows: **To Darius the king, all peace: Let it be known to the king**
[291] **that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with unfinished stone and the timbers are being laid in the walls; and the work is being carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress in their hands. So we questioned those elders and spoke to them as follows, 'Who gave you the authority to build this house?'**[2] and so on. In these words we should also note in what sense it is said that God's house was built from 'unfinished stone',[3] when it is evident that such a great work **/125/** could only have been built from finished stones. Yet by 'unfinished stone' we should understand new stone[4] which they themselves discovered unhewn but, by shaping it up, made it suitable for the building of the Lord's house. For even though some of the old stones remained, which, as the lamenting Jeremiah shows, were scattered *at the end of every street*,[5] yet no one can doubt that new stones also had to be shaped to complete the work of the temple. The mystery of this matter is undoubtedly plain, since

1 Ezra 5:17.

2 Ezra 5:7–9.

3 'from unfinished stone' = *lapide impolito*. This is a difficult text in the original and little consensus exists over its exact meaning. The Aramaic phrase *'eben gᵉlāl* means 'stones of rolling', and hence some have argued that what is meant are stones so huge that rollers were needed to move them: see Yamauchi 1988: 637. The Septuagint, however, has *eklektos* 'choice', and modern versions propose such renderings as 'unpolished' (Douay), 'heavy' (NKJV), 'huge' (RSV; NASB), and 'large' (NIV). But the Latin *impolitus* means 'unpolished', which is to say, stone in its natural state, i.e. not finished by human craftsmanship.

4 That is, natural stones that have not been previously used for building. Bede is pointing out that both old stones from the first temple as well as new stones were used for the second temple.

5 Lam. 4:1.

we have seen that God's Church is built not only from those who by repenting regain their senses and return to the life of holiness which they have previously squandered by sinning, but also from those who have recently been called to the faith, arranged by the instruction of teachers as though with the measuring-rod of builders, and so inserted into the edifice of the Lord's house in a place appropriate to themselves. Yet the fact that the temple was built from both old and new stones, that is both from stones that had been finished long previously and from those that had remained unfinished for longer, can also rightly be interpreted as corresponding to the fact that the one Church of Christ is assembled from both peoples, namely Jews and Gentiles – the Jews who long since had been as though finished through knowledge and mindfulness of God's law, the Gentiles who, being enslaved to idolatry, had not by any industry of spiritual architects or any cultivation of piety divested themselves of the ugliness of a rustic and earthly mind.[1]

In the same letter there follows: **and the timbers are being laid in the walls**. The timbers, which were put in place to support or decorate the temple walls, signify the same life of the saints that adorns the Holy Church, which the stones too signify, as we have taught above.[2] The prophet mentions these timbers **/150/** in the psalm in which the Lord's house is built after the captivity: *Then all the timbers of the woods will sing for joy before the Lord since he comes to judge the earth*.[3] The hearts of those who were once proud indeed sing for joy since they merited to be cut down from the impious mountain of ancestral tradition[4] and transferred for the construction of the Lord's house. On the other hand, they sing for joy *before the Lord since he comes to judge the earth* – they have prevented the severity of his judgement by a fear that brings salvation, and him whose advent it was possible for them to fear as sinners in the past, they now, having been corrected and justified, desire to arrive as swiftly as possible.[5] *[292]*

That letter, therefore, was written with treacherous words, this one

1 On the theme of the Church's having been built by both Jews and Gentiles, cf. *De templ.* 1 (149.80–101); and Scheil 2004: 66–97.

2 See *In Ezr.* 2.122–45.

3 Ps. 96:11–12 (95:12–13).

4 *de monte impio paternae traditionis*: the phrase recalls 1 Pet. 1:18, 'the useless way of life of your ancestral tradition' (*de vana vestra conversatione paternae traditionis*).

5 Cf. Gregory *Homiliae in evangelia* 1.1.1 (CCSL 141:11.153–55).

with friendly ones, and rightly so because the former letter was sent by the Samaritans, undoubtedly the enemies of the Jews, whereas this one was sent by the governor of the region beyond the river (i.e. lower Syria and Phoenicia) and by his companions, who harboured no personal hatred against the Jews but merely tried to know and carry out the will of the king from whom they received the power of leadership. Hence the Samaritans, who by writing the first letter enflamed the feelings of the king against the temple builders, are rightly compared to heretics, who frequently defile the Church with foul corruption to so great an extent that they make it detestable even to Gentiles, inciting their fury against it. Furthermore, this governor of Syria, who does not stir up the king concerning the work of God's house by accusation, but questions him by consultation, properly stands as an image of those who, still 'located among the Gentiles',[1] marvel at the faith and works of the Church and do not deny that they would believe if they could understand that this faith is the true and just worship of divinity.

/175/ Finally, hearing from the elders of the Jews when they gave the reason of their building, **We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are building the temple that was constructed many years ago, and which a great king of Israel**[2] **built and set up. But after our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath and he handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean king of Babylon, he also destroyed this house**,[3] and the rest that they replied concerning the renovation of this temple that was ordered by Cyrus, he and his counsellors no longer wished to make any objection nor to impede the builders but inquired with a simple heart whether Cyrus had ordered that the temple be rebuilt and whether Darius himself wished the same. Having ascertained the wish of each king to build the temple, he himself and his counsellors also diligently endeavoured to give their support in order that the work might be accomplished as quickly as possible, as is written in what follows. All these events accord with the thought and action of those who, previously established in the Gentile way of life, suddenly see the way of life of the Holy Church and are

1 Gregory *Moralia in Job* 14.55.70 (CCSL 143A:742.97–743.98); and *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 2.6.20 (CCSL 142:309.476–77).

2 I.e. Solomon.

3 Ezra 5:11–12.

amazed,[1] then are eager to hear and to learn the meaning of this religion, and at last, when they have discerned that this religion originated from the God of heaven and earth who alone is the true God, believing in its sacraments rejoice themselves to take part and to support its edifice.[2] But let us see what King Darius did when he received the letter of the governor and his counsellors.

[6:1–3] Then, it says, **King Darius issued an order, and they searched in the archive of the books which were stored in Babylon, and there was found in Ecbatana, which is a fortress in the province of Madena, a scroll, /200/ and this record was written in it: In the first year of Cyrus the king, King Cyrus decreed that the house of God which is in Jerusalem should be built in a place where they may sacrifice animals as offerings.** Josephus stated the name of the place in which this letter of Cyrus was found as follows: *And a book was found at Ecbatana in a fortress built in the region of Media*.[3] Moreover, another translation[4] has the following: *In Ecbatana in a very secure building in the region of the Medes*. Hence it seems likely that the name 'Madena' means nothing other than 'Media'. Moreover, as regards what follows, *[293]*

[6:3–4] And so that they lay foundations that may support a height of sixty cubits and a breadth of sixty cubits, three rows of unfinished stones and in the same way rows of new timber, we need not comment

1 Reading (with MS R) *obstupescunt* for *obstupescere*: see Appendix 1. If *obstupescere* is correct, it is necessary to add another word, such as *incipiunt*, 'begin', to complete the sense.

2 Bede may well have had in mind the conversion experience of his own people when he wrote these words. As he explains in the early chapters of the *Ecclesiastical History*, King Æthelberht of Kent warmly received the first wave of missionaries sent from Rome, allowing them to preach to his people even though he at first refused to forsake his pagan beliefs. As the missionaries began to preach the Gospel to whomever they could, the people, 'marvelling at their simple and innocent way of life and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine, believed and were baptized', the king included – *HE* 1.26 (77).

3 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.4.6. Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), the capital city of Media, the homeland of the Medes, served as the summer residence of the Persian kings, which explains why Cyrus's decree permitting the rebuilding was found there: see Bilkes 2000a.

4 'another translation' = *alia translatio*. Here Bede's quotation does not agree with the Old Latin text of the Vercelli manuscript, which has *iecbatanis in bari medorum regione*… (fol. 112r, col. 1). The reference may therefore be to Jerome's hexaplaric revision of Esdras B, possibly available to Bede in the Codex Grandior: see Introduction, pp. xx–xxi.

on it because neither in the building of the first temple nor of the subsequent one are any of these measurements or work of this sort found.[1] It can thus be inferred that Cyrus proposed this from his own ideas and that he noted the measurement and arrangement of the work as seemed appropriate to him. Indeed, as the Chronicles relate, in the first measurement (that is, inside the inner walls)[2] the temple was sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide,[3] but the height, as the history of the Kings explains, was thirty cubits to the upper-room;[4] from there to the higher chamber an additional thirty cubits which was the level reached by the top of the porticos,[5] as Josephus attests;[6] and from there another sixty to the top of the roof – which is to say, a hundred and twenty cubits all together, as the Chronicles explain.[7] Yet how does it

1 Though some modern scholars (e.g. Williamson 1987: 83) share Bede's doubt over these figures, the height and width may actually be correct. For according to Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 15.11.1, the height of the second temple was in fact 60 cubits, since one of the reasons Herod gave for wishing to rebuild it was that it fell 60 cubits short of what he imagined the original height of the first temple to have been (120 cubits); and assuming that Ezekiel's visionary temple had the same width as the real one (cf. Ezek. 41:1–9, 1 Kings 6:2–6), which seems not unlikely, then its *external* width, counting the thickness of its walls and those of the side chambers, would have been 60 cubits also.

2 That is, the interior measurements of the temple.

3 2 Chron. 3:3.

4 1 Kings 6:2.

5 *altitudo porticuum* = 'top of the porticos'. In the plural, the noun *porticus* is used by Bede to denote the three side chambers surrounding the temple's inner shrine, which consisted of the nave and the Holy of Holies. It is to be distinguished from *porticus* in the singular, which Bede uses later in this passage, meaning the porch attached to the front of the inner shrine (see below, p. 87, n. 4). Cf. *XXX quaest*. 11 (303.5–304.10). It is not clear why Bede interpreted the side buildings of the temple as 'porticos'. In the Vulgate they are referred to as *tabulata*, 'floors' or 'storeys' or as *latera*, 'sides'. Bede may have referred to these side buildings as porticos because the churches he was familiar with had side chapels. As Colgrave and Mynors explain, glossing Bede's use of the word *porticus* in *HE* 2.3 (143, n. 3): 'The word *porticus* is used frequently by Bede… to mean a separate chapel opening out from the nave or the chancel, the doorway leading into it being usually small; they were often used as burial chambers. The church of St. Peter and St. Paul at Canterbury (later St. Augustine's) had *porticus* on the north and south sides, as excavations have revealed.'

6 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.3.2.

7 2 Chron. 3:4. Bede gives the same dimensions for Solomon's temple in three other works: *De templ.* 1 (160.532–161.564 and 166.785–93); *Hom.* 2.25 (375.267–70); and *XXX Quaest*. 11 (303.1–304.11). In each of these accounts, Bede tries to harmonize two conflicting descriptions of the temple – those in 2 Chron. 3:4 and Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.3.2 on the one hand, which give the temple a total height of 120 cubits, and

say that three rows of unfinished stones **/225/** and in the same way rows of new timbers are to be laid, when all inside the temple was lined with cedar, unless perhaps it was a custom of the Persians to make temples with varied work[1] in such a way that there were three rows of stones throughout the walls and a fourth made skilfully from timbers, and Cyrus thought that this should be done too in the same manner in the Jerusalem temple; or perhaps we should understand that he spoke of the courtyard of the priests,[2] which, built in a circle around the temple, had three rows of finished stones and a fourth of cedar wood,[3] and was as high as a man's chest; or else of the portico of the Lord's house that was in the front of the temple,[4] concerning which Scripture, when King Solomon's palace was being built, relates thus: *And he made the greater courtyard round with three rows of hewn stones, and one row of planks of cedar, and also in the inner courtyard of the Lord's house and in the portico of the house*.[5] *[294]*

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that of 1 Kings 6:2 on the other, which assigns it only 30 cubits in height. In attempting to do so, Bede appears to have assumed, following Josephus, that the temple was divided into two major levels, each 60 cubits high, but in order to accommodate the mention in 1 Kings 6:8 of three different storeys – which he wrongly took as referring to the main temple building rather than to the different levels of the side chambers attached to its outer walls – Bede further divided the temple's lower half, which was 60 cubits high, into two levels of equal height. The first of these portions, spanning the distance from the ground floor to the 'upper room' or top of the first storey, comprised the 30 cubits given in 1 Kings 6:2, while the second storey comprised an additional 30 cubits and the third the final 60 cubits, for a total of 120 cubits, as Chronicles and Josephus propose. For a helpful diagram of these dimensions, see Foley and Holder 1999: 140–42.

1 'with varied work' = *opere variato*. At *De tab*. 2 (44.88), while discussing the curtains that covered the tabernacle on all its sides, Bede uses the similar phrase *opere plumario variatum*, translated by Holder (p. 46) as 'a variegated veil of embroidery work'. The same phrase appears also in Ex. 26:1, where it is used to speak of embroidery work in various colours and textures; here in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, the phrase *opere variato* is used to denote a similar pattern of variegated materials, including both stones and wood carefully arranged.

2 The courtyard of the priests was the place where the priests and Levites ministered. It is described more fully in *De templ*. 2 (192.2–199.188). Cf. *XXX quaest*. 18 (311.20–34).

3 Cf. 1 Kings 6:36. Thus the plan and method for the construction of the second temple was intended to mirror those used in building the first temple: see Williamson 1987: 82–83.

4 Here, in its singular form, the noun *porticus* refers, as noted above, not to the three side chambers but to the porch (Hebrew *ûlām*) in front of the door at the temple's east end. Cf. *De templ*. 1 (161.565–162.614).

5 1 Kings 7:12.

[6:5] But also let the gold and silver vessels of the temple of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be returned and brought back to their place in Jerusalem, which also have been placed in the temple of the god. When he says that the vessels were at that time placed 'in the temple of the god', he means the temple of the Babylonians in which Nebuchadnezzar had put them and, as is stated more clearly earlier in the book,[1] from which Cyrus had ordered they be removed and brought back to Jerusalem. The letter of King Cyrus that had been found in Ecbatana ends at this point. To which suddenly in a novel and unusual way there is an addition in the name and authority of King Darius:

[6:6–7] So you, Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the river, /250/ Shethar-Bozenai and your counsellors the Apharsachites, who are beyond the river, go far away from them, and let that temple of God be built by the governor of the Jews and their elders: let them build that house of God on its site. The sequence of events in the text is as if Darius himself had read Cyrus's letter and, having perused it, immediately endorsed it with his authority, in such a way that suppressing all their adversaries, he ordered the temple of God to be rebuilt on its site[2] just as the letter said, and himself, with a most devout mind in all things, assisted God's worshippers to serve his will. Let Artaxerxes, therefore, who above forbade that the house or city of God be built,[3] designate those lords of worldly affairs who by inciting persecutions opposed the construction of the Holy Church, while in the upheaval of these persecutions that Church flourished chiefly by the triumph of martyrs. Let Darius designate the dutiful devotion of those kings who, recognizing the will [of God], endeavoured not only not to resist the Christian faith but also to assist it with their decrees; and many of them, forbidding the persecutions of their predecessors, wished that they themselves along with the peoples under their sway might be consecrated in the sacraments of the same faith.[4] It is very consistent with

1 Ezra 1:7.

2 *in suo loco*. The temple was to be rebuilt on the site of the first temple: see Ezra 5:15 and Williamson 1987: 82–83.

3 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1735–1850.

4 Throughout Book 2 especially, Bede reads those kings who aided the Jewish rebuilding effort as symbols of kings who use their power to support the Church: e.g. *In Ezr*. 2.273–83, 300–06, 342–54, 417–32, 976–85, 998–1001, 1151–55, and 1231–42. While in the present passage Bede appears to be contrasting pagan Roman emperors who persecuted the Church with those later ones who converted to and supported

the character of these kings that to the words of King Darius it is subsequently added:

[6:8] But I have also decreed what should be done by those presbyters of the Jews, that the house of God may be built, namely let the expenses be generously given to them from the king's treasury, that is from the revenues that are paid from the region beyond the river, so that the work will not be hindered. For indeed, who can describe how the Church **/275/** throughout the world has been either aided or even *[295]* enriched by the generosity of royal gifts? On the allegorical level, however, it can also be interpreted as meaning that the expenses are paid out from the royal treasury for the work of the temple when even some members of the household of secular rulers come, through the encouragement of these rulers, to faith in Christ. They were in the king's treasury, so to speak, since they were in the confidence of the king's secrets.[1] But they are paid out to the presbyters (i.e. to the elders of the Jews) for the expenses of the work of the temple when they are entrusted to those teachers who have preceded them in the confession of Christ that they might be instructed and united with the members of the Church. Cassiodorus, the former senator[2] who suddenly

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Christianity, his remarks might also be said to reflect his contemporary task of reorienting newly converted Northumbrian rulers once governed by a pagan ethos to a Christianized understanding of their regal mission. Indeed, as the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht* shows, Bede knew that successful church reform in his own day would require the support of Christian kings such as Ceolwulf, to whom he dedicated the *Ecclesiastical History* and who he expected would aid the reforming efforts of bishop Ecgbtrht, on which see *Epist. Ecg.* 9 (412). For more on Bede and Christian kingship, see Campbell 1979 and McClure 1983.

1 There is word-play here in Bede's use of *archa*, 'treasury' and *archanorum*, 'secrets'.

2 Cassiodorus (c. 490–c. 585) was a member of a distinguished senatorial family and the founder of the famed Christian school at Vivarium; the Latin word *senator* is actually part of his name (Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator), though Bede and many others took it as a title: see O'Donnell 1979: 16. Of all Cassiodorus's work, his extensive Psalm commentary, which Bede mentions here, was the best known in early Anglo-Saxon England. Bede's own library at Jarrow evidently owned a complete three-volume copy of the work, which had been brought there from Rome along with other Cassiodoran books (e.g. the Codex Grandior) by Benedict Biscop and Abbot Ceolfrith: see Halporn 1980 and 1981; and Bailey 1983. What Bede says here about Cassiodorus's accomplishments as a patristic scholar is indeed comparable to what Bede himself did in his own life's work, which he often characterized as 'following in the footsteps of the Fathers' (*patrum vestigia sequens*). On Bede's debt to Cassiodorus, see Laistner 1935 and Meyvaert 1996.

become a Doctor of the Church, is just such a person. For when he carefully examined in his outstanding commentary on the Psalms what Ambrose, Hilary, Augustine, Cyril, John, and the other Fathers[1] have said, he showed beyond a doubt that he was educated by 'the elders of the Jews', i.e. by those who confessed and praised God. Similar to this are the words that follow:

[6:9–10] And if anything else is needed, whether calves and lambs and young goats as a burnt offering to the God of heaven, or wheat, salt, wine and oil according to the custom of the priests who are in Jerusalem, let it be given to them daily, so that there be no complaint in anything. And let them make offerings to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his children. For who could not know that calves, lambs and young goats, which are clean animals, and wheat, salt, wine and oil and the things which were offered to God by the Law, are often customarily understood in the Holy Scriptures to indicate good people, perfect works, or spiritual gifts? **/300/** All these things are nowadays by the king's command offered as a burnt offering to the God of heaven when, supported by the powers of this world, the riches of the Holy Church increase and the subject people of these rulers are gathered from everywhere into one and the same faith of truth to be consecrated to Christ; and whatever naturally good thing anyone has heard through divine inspiration, whatever healthful thing he has learned from men of the churches, all this he devotes to the service of divine worship. Concerning these offerings it is fittingly said that they should be given **according to the custom of the priests who are in Jerusalem**, doubtless because the vows of those who offer them become acceptable to the Lord only if they are offered according to the custom of catholic peace. For whatever good things are thoroughly mingled with either pagan belief or heretical speech should in no way be deemed good. The priests make offerings on behalf of the life of the king and his children, according to that saying of the Apostle: *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone – for kings and all those who are in high station, that we may live a peaceful and quiet life*.[2]

[296] **[6:11] Therefore, it has been decreed by me that if anyone changes this commandment, a beam is to be pulled from his house and set up and**

1 Reading *patres* for *fratres*: see Appendix 1. Note here that an unknown author (PL 69:432), quoting this passage from Bede, in fact has *quid caeteri Patres dixerunt*.

2 1 Tim. 2:1–2.

he is to be nailed upon it, and his house is to be confiscated. The literal sense is obvious, namely that he wished anyone who tried to alter a decree of his religion to die through the harshest punishment – namely, with the loss of everything he could possess and of his soul which, nailed on a beam, he would lose through the torment of prolonged torture. But the spiritual understanding is clear too because all our works **/325/** are compared to trees, good works to fruit-bearing ones but evil works to ones that are barren and worthy of fire;[1] and a beam is pulled from the house of him who has tried to speak against the holocausts of the Lord, and it is set up and he is nailed upon it when it becomes manifestly clear to everyone how useless and perverse are the works of those who fight against the peace of the Holy Universal Church; and in those works, they are shown to have sought for themselves not the joy of life but rather the noose of death. And the house also of such people is confiscated (i.e. is condemned to be public property) when even their bodies in which they have remained in this life for too long are handed over at the resurrection to most vicious torturers (i.e. unclean spirits) to be punished with eternal torment. Darius fittingly and faithfully desired that his decree be strengthened with the aid of divine power when directly he added in prayer, saying: **[6:12] May God, who has caused his name to dwell there, overthrow all kingdoms and any people who lift their hand to resist and destroy the house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius have made this decree, which I desire be carried out dutifully.** And so, as a man endowed with kingship in this world, Darius himself does all he can by public law for the sake of the peace of God's house and, insofar as he can, crushes the protestors, and he asks God truly to accomplish this, because his power is eternal and omnipotent; and with pious devotion he desires both that his name might remain in his house forever and that whoever has presumed to wage war against it should himself be deprived of his power and life for all eternity. This occurs in the same way today in **/350/** the Holy Church when terrestrial powers that have been converted to the faith issue public edicts for the establishment of that Church and, since the Lord aids the Church and puts all its enemies under its feet, desire that it should always enjoy restful calm and peace.

1 Cf. Matt. 7:17–19; for an extended comparison of symbolic good and bad trees, see Bede *Hom*. 2.25 (369.54–371.100).

[297] **[6:13–14] And so Tattenai, governor of the country beyond the river, and Shethar-Bozenai and his counsellors, diligently carried out what King Darius had decreed. And the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper.** Nowadays too, as the peoples flow together to the faith, and sometimes even those outside the faith support its peace, the elders of the Jews (i.e. those worthy of the position of teacher) daily build the Church by their word or example and they prosper, because although for a time the ancient enemy attacks, the word of God still finds some in whom it can prevail and, once it has put its enemies to flight, raise up the walls of truth.

[6:14] And they prospered, it says, **according to the preaching of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo.** For these prophets had predicted that if they persisted in building the temple, soon, with the Lord's assistance, they would not only complete the work itself but also have a more abundant supply of all good things as a reward for their devotion. Among their proclamations are Zechariah's words: *The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will complete it, and you will know that the Lord of Hosts has sent me to you*,[1] which is to say, 'when you see that the temple has been completed by Zerubbabel himself, by whom it was begun, then you will understand that I was sent by the Lord and that what I have said I have said at his command'. **/375/** And Haggai says: *From this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day when the foundations of the Lord's temple were laid*, *store it in your heart. Is the seed as yet to sprout? Or have the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree not blossomed? From this day on I will bless you*.[2] What happened in the event shows that this prediction was correct. But all the prophets, indeed all the writers of Sacred Scripture, promise good things for the builders of the Holy Church (i.e. teachers) if they do not tire from adversities and cease from their holy labour. For divine help will be present,[3] by which the Lord's house that has been begun may be brought to completion in the heart of their listeners by their believing and living well; and to the architects themselves will come the blessing of crops, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive (i.e. a more copious abundance of spiritual gifts), which without any doubt will be more copiously granted to us by the Lord the more

1 Zech. 4:9.
2 Hag. 2:19–20.
3 Reading *Aderit* for *Aderint*: see Appendix 1.

diligently we have endeavoured to establish the abode of his glory either in ourselves or in the hearts of our neighbours.

Let no one consider Haggai's statement that the temple foundation was laid in Darius's reign[1] as contrary to the sacred history we are expounding, in which it is written that the temple was founded by the *cementarii* in the second year of King Cyrus as the people rejoiced and exuberantly praised God.[2] For at that time, the foundation of the temple itself (i.e. the holy inner temple) was described, whose measurements are reported specifically in Kings and Chronicles, whereas now we are told how, along with the construction of the house itself, they laid the foundations of the porticos and treasure chambers that **/400/** surrounded the house itself in a circle on all its sides, of which mention is made in the Book of Chronicles as follows: *he also made the courtyard of the priests, and a great basilica, and doors of the basilica which he covered with bronze*.[3] In this *basilica* which was put around the temple, the people were accustomed to stand at prayer and the watchmen and the gatekeepers of the temple also used to keep watch by day and night, as the same Book of Chronicles teaches in great detail.[4] This *basilica* is sometimes considered in a general way a part of the temple itself, as when in the Gospel the Pharisees and scribes brought the woman caught in adultery to the Lord when he was teaching in the temple and there is no way they could have brought any women into the temple except into some of its porticos,[5] which sometimes individually go under the names of treasure chambers, *exedra*, porticos, and courtyards. Hence the psalmist's words: *You who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God*.[6] *[298]*

1 Hag. 2:1.

2 Cf. Ezra 3:8–11.

3 2 Chron. 4:9. The 'great *basilica*' (*basilicam grandem*) mentioned here and in the lines following formed the outside boundary of the courtyard of the priests. Bede provides a clearer picture of how he envisages it in *Thirty Questions*, where he calls it a 'very long rectangular building' (*longe aedis permaxima in quadrum*): see *XXX quaest.* 18 (311.34); he mentions it again at *De templ.* 2 (192.1–194.114), where a fuller discussion of it seems to have been made possible by his familiarity with two sources, Josephus's *Antiquities* and the image of the temple that Cassiodorus had placed in the Codex Grandior, on which see Meyvaert 1996: 853–60.

4 1 Chron. 9:17–34, 26:12–19.

5 John 8:2–3. Bede notes these verses in the same connection in *De templ.* 2 (193.57–59).

6 Ps. 134:1 (133:1).

[6:14–15] And they built it and finished it, at the command of the God of Israel and at the command of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of the Persians. And they completed this house of God on the third day of the month Adar, which was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. By Artaxerxes[1] he means the one who ruled after Darius, in whose time Ezra came up from Babylon to Jerusalem. It may be asked, however, how it can be said that God's house was built at the command not only of Cyrus and Darius, but of Artaxerxes too, since it is directly added that it was completed and dedicated when Darius was still ruling.[2] Perhaps we should understand that Artaxerxes too sent a great weight of gold and silver to Jerusalem and ordered that, if there was anything lacking in the building or **/425/** in the adornment of the temple or its vessels, it might be completed from this same money that he had sent and donated. For it is written that when Ezra was hastening there, this king and his princes and counsellors sent a very large quantity of gold, silver, and precious vessels to the temple.[3] There, among other things, it was stated in the king's letter: **And anything else needed for the house of your God, whatever you may need to spend, you will provide from the treasury and exchequer of the king**.[4]

The month of Adar, on the third day of which the Lord's house was completed, is the one which among us is called March, which Scripture usually terms the twelfth month, according to the moon's course. Nor
[299] is it devoid of mystery that the Lord's house, which was begun in the seventh month with the building of the altar, was finished in the twelfth month. For it was begun at the beginning of the seventh month because it is with the grace of the Holy Spirit leading us that we begin every good thing we do and with it accompanying us that we complete it.[5] But it was completed in the twelfth month in order to signify the perfection that is contained in this number, especially on account of

1 Artaxerxes I: see above *In Ezr*. 2.94 and the accompanying note.

2 The rebuilding of the temple was completed in 515 BC in the sixth year of Darius's reign, hence well before Artaxerxes I came to the throne in 465 BC. Mention of Artaxerxes at this point, therefore, is anachronistic, and modern scholars hasten to point out that this should probably be seen as an interpolation by the biblical author(s): see Myers 1965: 53 and Williamson 1987: 79–80.

3 Cf. Ezra 7:14–19.

4 Ezra 7:20.

5 Recall Bede's earlier point, noted at *In Ezr*. 1.1069–70, that Scripture describes the grace of the Holy Spirit as sevenfold: see Is. 11:2–3 and Rev. 1:4

the number of the apostles, in whose faith and teaching the Church is completed. Further, the number twelve designates the perfection of true faith and works, for whether you multiply three by four or four by three, you will get twelve; three rightly refers to faith on account of the confession of the Holy Trinity, four to good deeds on account of the same number of principal virtues – prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice. The Book of Wisdom mentions these in praise of this same **/450/** wisdom when it says: *For she teaches temperance, and prudence, and justice, and fortitude, than which there is nothing more useful in a man's life*.[1] It is appropriate, therefore, that the Lord's house was begun in the seventh and completed and dedicated in the twelfth month, because the mind of the elect is illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit that it might come to the achievement of good works combined with faith in the holy and undivided Trinity, and thus full of joy, it awaits the dedication of a blessed reward. And since this reward of our future consecration is itself completed at the moment of universal resurrection and when we shall see the same Trinity in which we now believe,[2] it is rightly mentioned that the house of the Lord was completed not only in the twelfth month but on the third day of the month as well. For since the Lord rose from the dead on the third day, our resurrection too can properly be designated by the expression 'on the third day', about which the prophet says: *For he himself took us, and cared for us. He revived us after two days: on the third day he raised us up*.[3]

Now the construction of the temple was begun in the first year of King Cyrus[4] and was completed in the sixth year of King Darius, which, according to the evidence of the chronicles,[5] constitutes a period of

1 Wis. 8:7.

2 There is an echo here of John 20:29: 'blessed are those who have not seen, but nonetheless have believed'.

3 Hosea 6:2–3.

4 Just above, at *In Ezr*. 2.393, Bede says that the temple was founded in the second year of Cyrus's reign (Ezra 3:8), but here he presumably counts from the first year instead since it was then that the altar was begun (Ezra 3:2) and the materials began to be assembled (Ezra 3:7).

5 The chronicles alluded to here are Eusebius's *Chronikoi Kanones*, in the Latin translation by Jerome, from which Bede is known to have derived his figures in *The Reckoning of Time* for the reigns of the Persian monarchs: see Jerome *Chronicon* (102a.15–106.18); and Bede *DTR* 66 (484.647–485.695), with Wallis's comments, p. 355.

forty-five years.[1] For Cyrus ruled for thirty years, and after him his son Cambyses (who in this book is called Artaxerxes, as Josephus[2] claims) ruled for eight; after him, the Magi who slew him ruled for a year,[3] and after them Darius ruled for six years until the completion and dedication of the temple – which, as we have said, totals forty-five years. However, it may be asked how, when the Lord told the Jews about his passion and **/475/** resurrection under the figure of the temple, *Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*, they responded, *It* [300] *took forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?*,[4] since no more than forty-five years are found between the first year of Cyrus's reign and the sixth of King Darius. But if we read Josephus's history, which, after the completion and dedication of the temple, allots three additional years during which the *peribolus* (i.e. the construction of the walls surrounding the temple)[5] and certain other buildings that had remained were finished, we will see that a total of forty-six years could rightly have been counted for the construction of the temple, during which time all its more important buildings were completed.[6]

But, guided by this chapter of the Gospel, we ought to bear in mind that the temple that was built by Solomon and rebuilt by Zerubbabel

1 Bede's calculations here are erroneous. Evidently he did not realize that the thirty-year period given in his source for the length of Cyrus's reign referred to his reign as King of Persia (559–530 BC), whereas the statement that the Jews returned from Babylon 'In the first year of Cyrus king of the Persians' (Ezra 1:1) refers to his first year as king of Babylon (538 BC). If the temple was begun in 538 and completed in the sixth year of King Darius (521–486 BC), it in fact took only 23 years to build, not 45.

2 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.2.1. In contrast to modern authorities, Bede accepts Josephus's claim that Cambyses was also known as Artaxerxes: see above *In Ezr*. 1.1719–22 and the accompanying note.

3 At *DTR* 66 (484.668), Bede says that the Magi brothers ruled for only seven months; here, he has rounded up that number to make it count as one full year, apparently in keeping with the standard practice of the chroniclers: cf. *In Ezr*. 2.790.

4 John 2:19–20. As noted (see above *In Ezr*. 1.1431–33 and the accompanying note), Bede believed that this forty-six year period referred to the building of the second temple, not Herod's, as most modern scholars believe.

5 Ezk. 42:7 describes the *peribolus* as 'an outer wall'; commenting on this verse, Jerome defines it as follows: '*Peribolus* means the outer wall that enclosed the treasure chambers in the outer court', *In Ezechielem* 13.42 (CCSL 75:613.251–54).

6 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.4.7. Bede may have pulled this detail from Jerome's *On Daniel*: 'Josephus adds on three more years, during which the *periboloi* and certain other buildings that had remained were finished' – *In Danielem* 3.9.24 (CCSL 75A:871.273–75).

and Jeshua holds a figure of manifold things. For it first designates every elect soul, which, because of the spirit of Christ dwelling within it, is rightly called his house or temple; secondly, the whole Church, that is, the congregation of all the elect, both angels and human beings; and thirdly the body of the Lord, which was born from a Virgin, lived in the world without sin, was dissolved in death by the wicked but was raised again to life by the Lord himself on the third day.[1] It fits especially well with the figure of Christ's body that the temple is said to have been built in forty-six years. For natural philosophers report that in this number of days the human body grows in the womb from the time of conception into the developed features **/500/** of its members.[2] And it was in every way proper that the house that was to have the figure of the Lord's body would be built in Jerusalem in the same number of years as the number of days that the Lord's body itself was to be created in the most holy womb of the Virgin. This Virgin is most truly the virgin Jerusalem, i.e. the *city of the great king*[3] and is to be named the 'vision of peace'[4] – that peace, doubtless, about which it is said: *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one*,[5] just as what is also written concerning this same temple, *The entrance for the middle side* (*ostium lateris medii*) *was on the right-hand portion of the*

1 In other words, the figure of the temple can be interpreted both tropologically and allegorically, the latter encompassing both Christ's actual body and the Church, i.e. his spiritual body (see Eph. 1:22–23, 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24). In *On Schemes and Tropes*, Bede provides justification for this kind of multi-levelled interpretation, again with reference to the temple: 'According to historical fact the temple of the Lord is the house which Solomon built; allegorically it is the body of the Lord, about which He said (1 John 2:19): "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". Or it is the Church, which was addressed as follows: (1 Cor. 3:17): "For the temple of the Lord is holy, such as ye are".… In like manner (Ps. 147:12–13): "Praise Jehovah, O Jerusalem. Praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee". This passage can be properly interpreted as a reference to the nations of the earthly Jerusalem, the Church of Christ, any elect soul, and the heavenly father-land, in accordance respectively with the historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical interpretations', *De schem. et trop*. 2.12 (168.265–169.269, 273–79), trans. Tannenhaus 121. Cf. Bede *In Cant*. 3 (260.610–25).

2 Augustine *De diversis quaestionibus* 56 (CCSL 44A:95.1–10). These remarks are repeated almost verbatim in Bede *Hom*. 2.24 (364.258–69); see also *Hom*. 2.1 (189.192–203). Berschin 1989: 99–101 discusses this and further symbolism attributed by Augustine and Bede to the number 46.

3 Ps. 48:2 (47:3).

4 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

5 Eph. 2:14.

house; and by a spiral stairway they went up to the higher storey and from the higher to the third,[1] specifically presented a figure of the Lord's body about which it is written, *But one of the soldiers opened his side with a spear, and immediately there flowed out blood and water*.[2] 'The entrance for the middle side was on the right-hand portion of the house' – that is to say, beginning on the ground floor from the eastern corner of the southern side and gradually continuing by a
[301] hidden passageway[3] through the interior of this same side to a higher floor, because our Lord and Saviour desired to open for us the door of salvation in the right side of his body,[4] through the sacrament of

1 1 Kings 6:8. Bede discusses this verse at length in four other works: *In Gen*. 2 (109.1275–99); *Hom*. 2.1 (190.239–191.266); *XXX quaest*. 12 (305.1–306.42); *De templ*. 1 (165.758–166.784). The five accounts have much in common, though *On Genesis*, *Thirty Questions*, and *On the Temple* give more attention to the verse's literal meaning, especially the phrase *in parte domus dextrae*, 'on the right-hand portion of the house'. Here in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, Bede's focus is the words *ostium lateris medii*, 'entrance of the middle side', which he takes (at line 515) to mean the 'southern side' (*lateris meridiani*), his assumption being that the entrance was towards the right-hand end of that side, i.e. at the south-eastern corner. Then, in order to make the words *ostium lateris medii* fit his allegory, he reinterprets them in a new context to mean 'the opening in the middle of [his] side', namely the wound made in Christ's right side by the soldier's lance. Curiously, 1 Kings 6:8 as quoted here differs from the other works. Whereas *On Genesis*, *Thirty Questions*, *Homily* 2.1, and *On the Temple* all employ the phrase 'the middle story' (*medium caenaculum*), which agrees with the Vulgate, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* has 'the higher story' (*superius cenaculum*). Although the two phrases mean the same thing – the comparative form *superius* indicates that it is 'higher' than the first floor yet not the highest floor, i.e. that it represents the middle floor (*medium caenaculum*) – the choice of *superius* in the present context is thematically apt in its stressing the theme of desire for, and movement towards, heaven.

2 John 19:34.

3 'hidden passageway' = *occulto itinere*. The terminology for this detail varies in the five accounts. *In Gen*. 2 (109.1285), *XXX quaest.* (304.11), *Hom.* 2.1 (190.239), and *De templ*. (166.770) all use the word *ascensus***,** 'stairway', a word not used in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*. In *Hom*. 2.1 (190.241–42), however, *ascensus* is glossed by the phrase *quasi invisibili gressu*, translated by Martin and Hurst as 'as if by an invisible entrance' (Martin and Hurst, 2:10), while *In Gen*. 2 (109.1285) has *invisibili ascensu*, which both seem to parallel the *occulto itinere* of *On Ezra and Nehemiah*. Despite these differences in terminology, what Bede seems to envisage is some kind of concealed stairway that connects the three storeys of the temple. However, whereas Bede seems to have believed that this stairway led to two upper floors of the temple, modern scholars hold rather that it connected only the three storeys of the temple's side chambers: see Foley *Thirty Questions*, p. 107, n. 5.

4 Allegorically, that is, the right side of the temple denotes the right side of Christ's body. Note, however, that John 19:34 (quoted above) says nothing about which side of

which we may be cleansed and sanctified and able to enter the lofty court of the heavenly kingdom. For we ascend through the entrance of the middle side to the higher storey when, consecrated through the water of baptism and the cup of the Lord's chalice,[1] we come from this earthly life to the celestial life of souls. From the higher we also go up to the third storey when **/525/** we crown the blessedness of our souls by receiving immortal bodies also.[2]

[6:16–17] Then the children of Israel, the priests and Levites, and the rest of the descendants of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God to him with joy. And they offered for the dedication of God's house a hundred calves, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats. The descendants of the exiles deservedly rejoice because they merited both to throw off the yoke of captivity and to rebuild the house of God that had been destroyed. And as servants devoted to God,[3] they offer very many victims for the dedication of his house; as lovers of brotherhood,[4] they make offerings too for the sin of all Israel – that is, not only for those who were able to be present, but also for those who were still living either in Babylon or in other regions beyond the Promised Land amidst their enemies. They asked that God would be merciful to them also and either keep them from evils amidst their enemies or rescue

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Christ had been pierced. That Bede here is merely following the authoritative belief of the Church is made clear in *On the Temple*: 'And aptly (does it say) on the right hand of the house because the holy Church believes that his right side was opened by the soldier' – *De templ.* 1 (166.762–4), trans. Connolly 29.

1 The sacrament of Baptism is represented by the water, and the Eucharist by the blood, that came from Christ's side when pierced by the soldier's spear (John 19:34).

2 In this passage, Bede is viewing the architecture of the temple as a metaphor for the various stages of spiritual development in the life of the Christian: the first level corresponding to the corrupt state of Original Sin into which we are born and from which we need to be sanctified; the second level to the state into which we enter when our souls are redeemed through Baptism and the Eucharist; and the third and final level to the state we shall enter into at the Last Judgement, when our redeemed souls shall be rejoined to our incorruptible bodies.

3 *quasi devoti Deo famuli*. The word *famulus*, 'servant', had strong monastic overtones for Bede, who refers to himself at the end of the *Ecclesiastical History* as *famulus Christi*, 'servant of Christ': see *HE* 5.24 (566).

4 *quasi fraternitatis amatores*. As a monk living in community, Bede also had a special interest in the love of the brotherhood, which he mentions often in his writing: e.g. *In Sam.* 2 (119.2140–42); *Epist. Cath.* (223.239–240.252); *Hom.* 2.12 (262.62–67); *De templ.* 1 (189.1701–05).

them from their enemies and lead them back to their longed-for homeland.

But since the rebuilding of the house after the captivity, as has often been said, designates the correction of those who through sin have wandered from the path of truth which they had only just set out on, it is fitting that when the temple has been restored in this way it is dedicated by the priests and Levites and the rest of the descendants of the exiles with joy. For when those who have sinned are set straight, *there is* great *joy* in heaven *in the presence of the angels of God*,[1] there is joy also for the teachers who have laboured for the salvation of those who go astray, and there is joy for all those who have migrated in their thoughts and deeds from Babylon (i.e. from the 'confusion of sinners')[2] to the citadel of the virtues,[3] which is truly the Promised Land. **/550/** So both the priests and the Levites and all the people rejoice in the dedication of the Lord's restored house because all the orders of the Holy Church must share in the rejoicing when those who have sinned are reconciled by repenting. They offer victims for this dedication when they bring vows of thanks to God for the efforts of sinners to lead a holy life, and when many, observing their life devoted to God, are themselves spurred on to works of greater virtue, not wishing to
[302] be found more slothful in good works than those than whom, by sinning less, they had remained more innocent. The offering of victims at this dedication can equally be interpreted in connection with those who have recently come to accept the faith and sacraments of Christ, in the sense that often many of those who have preceded them in the faith emulate the more fervent efforts of recent converts and grow in goodness by their examples.

Now the priests, Levites, and the people were offering victims not only for the dedication of the Lord's house which they had restored but for the sins of all Israel as well. They did this, no doubt, because while we ought to look with approval on the good works of our imme-

1 Luke 15:10.

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18).

3 'citadel of the virtues' = *virtutum arcem*. This phrase appears elsewhere in Bede: e.g. *In Gen*. 3 (193.1791–92) and 4 (229.1281); *In Cant*. 1 (220.359); *De templ*. 1 (152.226); *Rectract. Act. Apost*. 10 (140.8); and *Hom*. 1.16 (112.26). It is also used by such earlier writers as Ambrose *Hexaemeron* 3.12.51 (CSEL 32:93.23–24), Cassian *De institutis coenobiorum* 12 (CSEL 17:207.23), and Gregory *Moralia in Job* 3.8.12 (CCSL 143:121.16–17) and 27.24.44 (CCSL 143B:1364.22–23).

diate neighbours and make their virtues our own by imitating them, at the same time we should also pray assiduously to the Lord for the state of the whole Church throughout the world, according to the example of the Lord's Prayer itself, in which one is not bidden to pray for daily bread to be given specifically to oneself, or for one's own sins to be forgiven, or for oneself to be delivered from temptation or wickedness, but rather for all who have the same Father in heaven.[1] Likewise, the temple's construction is followed by its dedication when the sum of the elect, having been brought to completion at the end of time,[2] at last attains the grace of heavenly rewards. For this dedication, **/575/** very acceptable sacrifices are offered to God, those ones, doubtless, about which the same house of God (i.e. the Holy Church), rebuilt after the long captivity of mortal tribulation, throughout the glory of immortality sings to its Creator and Redeemer, saying: *You have broken my bonds; I will offer to you the sacrifice of praise*.[3] And because the same sacrifice of praise should be offered to God not only on account of the gifts of virtues that have been bestowed, but also on account of the filth of vices which has been purged and removed, it is right that after the calves, rams, and lambs were sacrificed for the dedication of the temple male goats too are said to have been slaughtered for the sins of all Israel: for truly the grace of God, which confers the benefits of virtues, also removes the wickedness of sins.[4] Nor does Pelagius, who used to argue that he and his followers could both be freed from evil and confirmed in good works by their own free will, have any place in the house of God.[5] Moreover, male goats are offered in this life for sin when the elect beseech the mercy of heaven that they might be freed from sins, and they are offered in the future life when they likewise give thanks to him for the fact that, through his gift, they have been freed from sins, and they will sing *the mercy of the Lord forever*,[6] because they never forget that they were wretched but by his gift have been made blessed.

[6:18] And they appointed the priests in their orders and the Levites

1 Cf. Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:3–4.

2 Cf. Bede *In Gen*. 4 (223.1055–58).

3 Ps. 116:16–17 (115:16–17).

4 Cf. Rom. 5:20.

5 Bede mentions Pelagius earlier: see *In Ezr*. 1.1627–31 and the accompanying note.

6 Ps. 89:2 (88:2).

in their divisions to supervise the services of God in Jerusalem, just as is written in the Book of Moses. The order of devotion required that, *[303]* after the building and dedication of the Lord's house, priests and Levites be straightaway ordained to serve in it: for there would be no point in having erected a splendid building **/600/** if there were no priests inside to serve God. This should be impressed as often as possible on those who, though founding monasteries with brilliant workmanship, in no way appoint teachers in them to exhort the people to God's works but rather those who will serve their own pleasures and desires there.[1] Yet the fact that it says that **the priests** were organized **in their orders and the Levites in their divisions** signifies the rotas of the weeks. In these, every assembly of each of the two grades was divided into twenty-four parts in such a way that each group would take turns to serve in the temple for eight days, namely from sabbath to sabbath, and then, freed from the duties of the temple, might take care of their own families for twenty-three weeks, as the Chronicles relate.[2] For all the way round the inner shrine they had already built the porticos of the temple,[3] in whose doors the Levites watched in turn, as we also read there.[4] But the phrase, **as is written in the Book of Moses**, pertains not to the divisions of the Levites but to the service of God. For it was

1 Another passage strongly reminiscent of the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*. In the *Letter*, Bede expresses concern for the widespread secularization of monastic houses at the hands of laymen, arguing, in words that reflect this passage, that 'they do not gather monks there but rather they find those vagrants who have been expelled from monasteries in other places for the sin of disobedience, or whom they have lured away from other monasteries, or, for sure, those of their own followers whom they can persuade to take the tonsure and promise monastic obedience to them. They fill the monastic cells they have built with these cohorts of the deformed, and as a hideous and unheard of spectacle, those same men occupy themselves with their wives and the children they have engendered, and rising from their beds, carefully deal with whatever needs to be done within the monastic enclosure' – *Epist. Ecg.* 12 (415–16); trans. McClure and Collins 351. Besides the obvious thematic parallel, there is some noteworthy linguistic overlap here too: compare the *Letter*'s 'serve only their own desires there' (*suis tantum inibi desideriis… deserviunt*: p. 415) with *On Ezra and Nehemiah*'s 'serve only their own pleasures and desires there' (*suis potius inibi voluptatibus ac desideriis serviunt*: lines 603–4). For more on the parallels between the *Letter* and *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, see Introduction pp. xxxi–xxxiii and DeGregorio 2004: 6–20.

2 1 Chron. 23–24; cf. Luke 1:8.

3 *porticus templi*: see above *In Ezr.* 2.221–22 and the accompanying note.

4 Cf. 1 Chron. 23:5, which says that some of the Levites were gatekeepers. This is explained more fully in 1 Chron. 26.

Moses who wrote about what the priests and what the Levites ought to carry out in God's house,[1] whereas the divisions of the Levites and the orders of the priests in their twenty-four parts about which we have spoken were prescribed not by Moses but by King David along with the prophets, priests, and Levites of his time.[2] Today too, when a church of Christ is built and dedicated through the regeneration of peoples who are new to the faith, it is proper that priests and Levites be established in their proper orders and turns to supervise God's service, so that not only may the peoples be admitted to the sacraments of the faith but also instructed to do the things that are of God by the examples and learning of those righteous ones who came to Christ before them[3] **/625/**, moreover not according to human notions but **as is written in the Book of Moses**. That saying of the Lord concurs with this: *Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*.[4] We must not, therefore, teach our hearers our own commandments but those of the Law and the Gospels, if we desire to arrive together with these same hearers at the rewards that the Lord has promised.[5]

1 The procedures and regulations of the priesthood are dealt with in Leviticus, particularly chapters 18–23.

2 Cf. 1 Chron. 23–27. In addition to overseeing the material preparations for the construction of the temple, David, with the help of the prophets (on which see 2 Chron. 29:25), saw to the arrangements of the temple's ministers, the Levites, and established a system of procedures for them to follow in their daily worship.

3 On Bede's concern for more teachers of the faith, cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1446–70, and the accompanying note. Early in the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede approvingly cites Pope Gregory's plan to foster the spread of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England through the appointment of twelve bishops in the south and an equal number in the north – see *HE* 1.29 (104–06). Yet the plan for the twelve northern bishops with a Metropolitan at York never materialized, much to Bede's dissatisfaction. That dissatisfaction and Bede's desire for a changed situation must surely have inspired passages like this one from the commentary that proclaim the need to ordain an ample supply of bishops and priests. Shortly before his death Bede was still anxious about the problem, mentioning in the *Letter to Ecgberht* Pope Gregory's original plan and then proclaiming: 'I should like you, holy father, under the protection and guidance of the previously mentioned most pious and God-beloved king [Ceolwulf], most assiduously to see to bring about the achieving of that number of bishops' – *Epist. Ecg*. 9 (413); trans. McClure and Collins 349.

4 Matt. 28:19–20.

5 Cf. Bede *De templ*. 1 (155.340–43).

[6:19–20] Now the descendants of the exiles celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. For all the priests and Levites were purified as one man: all were clean to immolate the Passover lamb for all the descendants of the exiles, for their brethren the priests and for themselves. What relevance did it have for the story to describe the celebration of the Passover after the Lord's house had been built, when it had already been promised long before that, from the first day
[304] of their arrival in Jerusalem, they would offer the legally prescribed sacrifices and holocausts on all the holy days of the Lord?[1] Perhaps he chose to make particular mention of the Passover celebration in order to make the reader aware that the descendants of the exiles completed the building of the temple with the same devotion of mind with which they had begun. For there it was already said that **the people gathered together as one man in Jerusalem, and Jeshua son of Jozadak rose up, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brethren, and they built the altar of God, that they might offer holocausts upon it;**[2] and now that the temple was dedicated and the forty-sixth year was already approaching, it is recorded that the same religious devotion **/650/** was present in the minds of all when it is said that **the priests and Levites were purified as one man: all were clean to immolate the Paschal lamb**. For what perfection can be greater in this life than the unity of a pure multitude? There were many thousands of priests, many thousands of Levites who all, nevertheless, had been purified and cleansed to sacrifice the Paschal lamb, and they did this not with diverse purposes of their souls but, as Luke wrote about the primitive Church of the New Testament, *with one heart and one soul*.[3] This is the unity of true faith and love for God, and a similar unity of love and purity is found among the people. When it is said, **to immolate the Passover lamb for all the descendants of the exiles, for their brethren the priests and for themselves**, it immediately adds,

[6:21] And the children of Israel who had returned from exile ate it, together with each one who had separated himself from the contamination emanating from the peoples of the land in order to seek the Lord, the God of Israel. Hence the paschal lamb was immolated for

1 Cf. Ezra 6:18.

2 Ezra 3:1–2.

3 Acts 4:32. On the monastic resonances this verse carried for Bede, see above *In Ezr*. 1.624–35 and the accompanying notes.

all the descendants of the exiles. And all the children of Israel ate the meal – not only those who had returned from captivity but also all who, though previously living elsewhere, had at that time separated themselves from the contaminations of their Gentile neighbours. This can also be rightly understood in connection with proselytes, who, though they were Gentiles by nature, were converted to the religious custom of God's people after accepting circumcision and having been cleansed through the legally prescribed offerings, in order that they also would be worthy to participate in the saving sacrifice. And one should note that he calls those who were enslaved to unclean practices 'peoples of the land', in order that he might teach, by way of contrast, that the 'peoples of heaven' are those who, having been separated from the others, served the Lord in unity **/675/** and chastity and celebrated his feast with a sincere heart. Nowhere else, unless I am mistaken, is the people of Israel found to have been of such devotion with their priests and Levites (i.e. their teachers) since the time when through Moses they went out from Egypt; but this devotion was brought about by divine punishment, since they had been handed over to their enemies to be punished for their sins, and having been afflicted by adversities and turned from their sins by repenting, thanks to their repentance *[305]* and religious life, they were freed from their enemies and led back to their own homeland to serve God better.

But even up until now we see very often that those who have desecrated the temple of their own body by sinning habitually, and through this have been held captive by the devil, have returned to the Lord through repentance and rightly with greater insistence than they were accustomed to before have toiled with good works to prepare a home in themselves again for their Creator.[1] For it should be noted that Solomon, during his very peaceful reign, completed the first temple in a short span of time since nobody opposed him in any way.[2] Now, however, after that temple was destroyed because of their sins, the descendants of the exiles, persevering with prolonged labour in great compunction of heart and very often hindered by their enemies, with God's help at last rebuilt it. For it is easy for anyone who has been converted to the faith and recognition of the truth to renounce the devil and confess the true living God and receive Christ's sacraments

1 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.785–94.

2 See 1 Kings 5:1–6:26; cf. Bede *De templ*. 1 (148.61–68).

and, once initiated in these for the remission of all his sins, to be made his temple[1] and by the present help of his grace preserve the innocence of life which they have received. But it takes great effort for someone **/700/** who by sinning shows his contempt for the sacraments of the faith he has received to win back his former worthiness, because to him easy purification through the water of baptism cannot be given again, but the foul crime must be washed away through the long labour of penance, copious streams of tears, and the unremitting toil of continence. The very habit of vices fights like a hostile crowd of Samaritans against the purification of such a person and is harder to conquer the longer it has occupied a land of the heart empty of virtue.

This too can be said, that the reason that special mention is made of the Passover sacrifice after the house of the Lord had been rebuilt and dedicated – since no one can doubt but that men of such devotion would wish to make the Passover sacrifice at the appropriate moment – was so that it might mystically be implied that the height of all perfection is when, rising above all the desires and enticements of the world, we constantly meditate with the full concentration of our mind on the entry to the next life. For the word 'Pascha' (Passover) means 'passing over'.[2] It has this name either because the children of Israel passed over on this day from slavery in Egypt to the joys of freedom through the immolation of a lamb, or because the spotless Lamb himself, i.e. Christ the Lord, was immolated for our redemption and passed over from this world to the Father. We too imitate this when we pass over from the pleasures here below to seeking the things of heaven. But we truly accomplish this when, freed from the prison of the flesh, we enter the heavenly kingdom. What follows aptly supports this interpretation:

[6:22] For seven days they joyfully celebrated the Feast of Unleavened
[306] **Bread.** For the Apostle teaches how **/725/** we ought to keep this feast in a spiritual way when he says: *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*.[3] This feast should be cele-

1 Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16.

2 Bede discusses the etymology of the word 'Passover' further in three of his homilies: see *Hom*. 2.1 (186.78–83), 2.2 (195.80–93); and 2.5 (214.7–16). He is relying on Augustine, principally *Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis* 55.1 (CCSL 36:463.9–464.21) and *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 68.2 (CCSL 39:902.16–903.38, and passim).

3 1 Cor. 5:8.

brated for seven days because through all the time of this world, which runs its course in as many days,[1] our life should be led in sincerity and truth, indeed in the sacrifices and holocausts of all good works. But since it was at the time of Passover that our Lord, through the eternal power of his resurrection, conquered the death that he had momentarily tasted, the celebration of Passover in this passage can also be related typologically to the time of our own resurrection. Thus the building of the temple stands for the present state of the Holy Church; its dedication for our future life which is spent amidst the joy of holy souls when they have left the body; and the sacrifice of the paschal lamb suggests the glory of the resurrection, when all the elect, through the flesh of the immaculate Lamb (i.e. our God and Lord), are made anew no longer in the sacrament by believing, but in reality and truth, by seeing.[2] For this reason also, at this Passover all the priests and Levites, the whole assembly of the people, all who flowed together to join them from the nations, are said to have been clean, all are said to have been there as if they were one, because truly at that time *the Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world*,[3] and as the Apostle John says: *The blood of Jesus the son of God purifies us from every sin*.[4] Then there will be true unity when *God* will be *all in all*;[5] then the true feast of unleavened bread will be celebrated with joy, when with no *leaven of malice and wickedness*[6] remaining among the elect, all will adhere to the vision of God in truth and sincerity of heart; and moreover not for the seven **/750/** days of this transitory age but for the *one day* of eternal life *in the Lord's courts*, which *is better than thousands* in the light of the Holy Spirit,[7] whose seven-fold grace the prophet commends to us.[8]

[6:22] They celebrated, it says, **the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, for the Lord had filled them with joy and had turned the heart of the Assyrian king to them, that he should help their hands in the work of the house of the God of Israel.** For this, surely,

1 See *In Ezr*. 1.1073–74 and the accompanying note for discussion of this theme.
2 Cf. John 20:29.
3 John 1:29.
4 1 John. 1:7.
5 1 Cor. 15:28.
6 1 Cor. 5:8.
7 Ps. 84:10 (83:11).
8 Is. 11:2–3.

is the greatest joy of the just in this world and in the next, that the work of the Church be completed when even the Gentiles who were formerly obstructive have been converted to aid her condition and strengthen the peace of the Christian religion throughout the whole world. So far we have described the return from Babylon to Jerusalem of the people who had been held captive; the bringing back of the vessels which had been carried away; the restoration and dedication of the temple which had been destroyed by fire; the celebration of the feast; and the singing of the Lord's songs[1] which, in the foreign land,
[307] they were not allowed to do – all under the leaders Zerubbabel and Jeshua. All these events contain one and the same knowledge of the salvation of the human race in Christ, when either those who have come into the world with the sin of the first transgression are saved once they are purified by the sacraments of the faith, or those who by sinning had corrupted the faith they received come to their senses again by repenting; and both, through one and the same Saviour, the true king and priest, as though celebrating the most joyous Passover, pass over from this world to the Father, from death to life. But because when the temple had been burned down and the city of Jerusalem had been demolished, the holy writings kept there were likewise burnt through enemy devastation,[2] **/775/** it was proper that, when the Lord showed mercy and returned to his people, these writings should also be restored, so that having repaired the buildings that had been destroyed they would also have writings from which they would receive encouragement and learn how they might be inwardly restored in faith and love of their Creator.[3] Hence the text appropriately continues:

1 Cf. Ps. 137:4 (136:4).

2 'were destroyed by enemy devastation' = *fuerant hostili clade perustae*. This wording echoes part of the couplet inserted over the Ezra miniature in the Codex Amiatinus, compiled at Bede's own Wearmouth–Jarrow some time before 716. The full couplet reads: *Codicibus sacris hostili clade perustis / Esdra Deo fervens hoc reparavit opus* ('After the sacred books were destroyed by enemy devastation, / Ezra, in his zeal for God, restored this work'). For more on the Ezra miniature, see Appendix 2.

3 Ezra's restoration of Scripture, in other words, is meant to bring about the spiritual and moral reform of his people. While not a part of the canonical story, Ezra's textual endeavours were evidently of great interest to Bede, who saw in the figure of Ezra an intersection of roles – scholar, reformer, teacher – on which to model his own mission to restore Northumbrian society to a state of spiritual health: see Introduction pp. xxxiii–xxxvi and DeGregorio 2004: 18–20.

[7:1–6] Now after these words[1] **in the reign of Artaxerxes king of the Persians, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah,** and so on until his genealogy is completed and it says, **son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest from the beginning – this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a scribe swift in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God had given to Israel**. This Artaxerxes, under whom Ezra came up from Babylon to Jerusalem, Josephus believes to be Xerxes son of Darius, who reigned after him.[2] Moreover, the books of the chronicles[3] hold that the successor of this same Xerxes, who also among them was called Artaxerxes, is designated here.[4] Now Darius, under whom the temple was built, ruled thirty-six years; after him Xerxes ruled for twenty years; after him Artabanus ruled for seven months (which the chroniclers set down as a year); and after him Artaxerxes ruled for forty years.[5]

Now Ezra, who is called **a swift scribe in the Law of Moses** for having restored the Law that had been destroyed, rewrote not only the Law but also, as the common tradition of our forebears holds, the whole sequence of sacred Scripture that had likewise been destroyed by fire, in accordance with the way that seemed to him to meet the needs of readers.[6] In this undertaking they say that he added certain words that

1 'After these words' refers to the completion and dedication of the temple in 515 BC. Assuming, as Bede and most modern scholars do, that it is Artaxerxes I (465–425 BC) who is mentioned here, there is a gap of almost sixty years between the completion of the temple in 515 BC and the coming of Ezra and the group of exiles who returned with him in 458 BC. Some modern scholars, however, believe that only Nehemiah came up during the time of Artaxerxes I, but Ezra during the time of Artaxerxes II (405–359 BC): see Yamauchi 1988: 648; Williamson 1987: 55–59; and Japhet 1994: 203–08.

2 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.5.1.

3 Jerome *Chronicon* (110.18–21).

4 In other words, the person meant here is not Xerxes I (485–465 BC) but Artaxerxes I. In Jewish Midrash, Xerxes was mistakenly identified with Artaxerxes: see Yamauchi 1980: 103. Note Bede's readiness to reject Josephus's views when they contradicted his Christian sources.

5 Jerome *Chronicon* (104a.25–26; 108.23; 110.15–16; 110.18–21); cf. Bede *DTR* 66 (484.672–486.720).

6 Cf. Bede *In Gen.* 3 (181.1385–89), *In Sam.* 2 (80.522–28), and *XXX quaest.* 7 (301.17–21), which similarly speak of Ezra's restoration of the Hebrew canon. Although the latter is mentioned by Jerome (*Prologus in Regum* 364) and Isidore (*Etymologiae* 6.3.2), the story itself derives ultimately from apocryphal sources, mainly 4 Esdras 14:9–48: see Myers 1974: 317–29. These verses tell of a vision in which Ezra is divinely inspired to restore the Law that was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 587 BC. In the story, Ezra sets aside forty days to record what God reveals to him

he considered useful, such as the saying, *And no prophet that the Lord knew face to face like Moses has risen in Israel*,[1] and so on, which could be said only by one who **/800/** lived a long time after Moses; and in the Book of Samuel, *Formerly in Israel, if a man went to inquire of God, he would say, 'Come, let us go to the one who sees,' because he who is today called a prophet used to be called one who sees*.[2] But they say he left untouched some complete books that the people of Israel previ-
[308] ously possessed, and that for this reason of these little else apart from the mention of their name is preserved today in Sacred Scripture, such as that saying in the Book of Numbers: *Whence it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord*;[3] and in Joshua: *Is it not written in the Book of the Righteous?*[4] Moreover, in both Kings and Chronicles are mentioned the historical books of the prophets Ahijah the Shilonite, Shemaiah, of Iddo and Nathan, of Isaiah also and of Jehu son of Hanani (about whom it is said that he wrote the book of the kings of Israel), and many others in addition to all these of which they say that no traces are found anywhere today.[5] The Hebrews also say – and among them there is no doubt on this matter – that this same Ezra devised simpler letters with the same names as they had had before, by which he might very rapidly restore the great quantity of books that

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and then dictates this revelation to five scribes who record the revelation in ninety-four books (4 Esd. 14:44). Ezra is then told to proclaim to the people the first twenty-four books copied but to keep the remaining seventy secret. Judging from Bede's allusion to 'the common tradition of our forebears' (*communis maiorum fama*), this story appears to have been known in some form in early Anglo-Saxon England; in this connection, Meyvaert 1996: 874, notes that Gildas quotes from 4 Esdras in his *De excidio Britanniae*. On the connection with reform, see above *In Ezr*. 2.772–78, and Introduction pp. xxxiii–xxxiv; also DeGregorio 2004.

1 Deut. 34:10.

2 1 Sam. 9:9.

3 Num. 21:14.

4 Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18. Modern translations usually refer to this lost book as the 'Book of Jasher', the Hebrew term *yāšār* meaning 'one who is honest or upright'. It is believed to have been a collection of ancient Hebrew poetry about 'heroic individuals who are the subjects of its contents or perhaps to all Israel as the upright people': see Christensen 1992: 646. Bede mentions this lost work also in *Thirty Questions*: see *XXX quaest*. 7 (301.6–9).

5 2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 32:32; 1 Kings 16:1–7. Bede mentions some of these titles in *Thirty Questions*: see *XXX quaest*. 7 (301.12–17). The works listed here appear to be tracts of a prophetic nature that did not make their way into the Hebrew canon: see Talmon 1987: 368.

had been destroyed.[1] For this reason he is called not just a scribe but a 'swift' scribe. The former letters, however, remained in use among the Samaritans, by which they were accustomed to write down the five books of Moses, which alone they accepted from Holy Scripture.

[7:7–9] And some of the children of Israel and children of the priests and children of Levites and some of the singers and the gatekeepers and the Nathinnites went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. And they arrived in /825/ Jerusalem in the fifth month, in the seventh year of the king. For he began his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month. Since he began to go up from Babylon on the first day of the first month and came to Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, it describes their arrival in Jerusalem in anticipation. For in what follows he describes in greater detail from the beginning both how they came up and where they gathered their company.[2] Now it is worth noting that at the beginning of this book it was written that, in accordance with Cyrus's promise, some of the descendants of Judah and Benjamin together with their priests and Levites came up from Babylon with their leaders Zerubbabel and Jeshua, all of whom God had aroused in spirit,[3] and concerning whom also it was added that they were from the captives that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon.[4] Here, however, under Ezra's leadership, no mention is made of Judah and Benjamin, no mention is made of Nebuchadnezzar's deportation, but only of the children of Israel and the priests and the Levites who went up with him. So it seems probable that those who were sent back to Jerusalem on the previous

1 Cf. Bede *XXX quaest.* 7 (302.22–26), which quotes Ezra 7:6. The apocryphal story in Esdras 4 makes no explicit mention of Ezra's devising a different script whereby to record his revelation; rather it says that the five scribes to whom Ezra dictated the vision recorded it in letters they did not understand (4 Esd. 14:42). Bede probably derived the story of Ezra's designing a new script from Jerome who, in the prologue to his Vulgate translation of Samuel and Kings, says that 'It is certain that Ezra the scribe and teacher of the law… invented the other letters that we now use' – *Prologus in Regum* 364. The writing described is the script used in biblical Hebrew (i.e. Aramaic 'square script'), whereas the Samaritan writing it replaced is the earlier palaeo-Hebrew (i.e. Phoenician script) extant in some inscriptions and some of the Qumran fragments: see Kenyon 1939: 40–41, 48–49.

2 Cf. Ezra 8:15–32.

3 Cf. Ezra 1:5–6.

4 See Ezra 2:1–58.

occasion were the ones from Judah and Benjamin who had been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, whereas those who we read were led back by Ezra on this occasion were from the ten tribes which were
[309] specifically called 'Israel' after the division, those whom the kings of the Assyrians had captured long before Nebuchadnezzar's time and caused to dwell beyond the mountains of the Medes.[1] Accordingly, at that time it was for the most part the two tribes who returned home and rebuilt the temple with arduous labour; the ten **/850/** tribes, however, which were less devoted to the temple and religion, neglected to return to their homeland even though the king commanded it, because once the empire of the Chaldeans had been destroyed, they lived freely under the kings of the Persians who used to esteem their people; but when they learnt that the temple had been rebuilt and the hatred of the Samaritans had been suppressed, at last some from among these same tribes agreed to go home, though many remained there, and their descendants are said to remain in these same parts and to serve the Persian people until this very day.

But just as Zerubbabel and Jeshua, as has often been said, designate the Lord Saviour, who releases the human race from captivity through his grace and himself builds his own house in us by sanctifying and taking possession of us, so in the same way Ezra the priest and swift scribe plainly stands for the same Lord who came *not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it*.[2] For he could rightly be called **a scribe of God's Law**[3] or **a scribe swift in the Law of Moses**[4] because he himself gave the Law to Moses through an angel, he himself *taught* the holy prophets *every truth*[5] through the grace of his own spirit, and he himself enflamed the minds of all the elect as soon as he touched them with his love to understand and carry out the will of God the Father. And so, promising the grace of the New Testament, the prophet declared: *This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those*

1 It is important to recall here that there were three separate returns from captivity: the first in 539 BC led by Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua; the second in 458 BC led by Ezra; and the third in 444 BC led by Nehemiah. Bede is pointing out, as noted at *In Ezr*. 1.542–52, that the members of the first return belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, whereas those who returned later with Ezra were descendants of the ten tribes taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC (see 2 Kings 17:3–6).

2 Cf. Matt. 5:17; cf. Gal. 3:19–24.

3 Ezra 7:12.

4 Ezra 7:6.

5 John 16:13.

days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their mind, and I will write them in their heart.[1] The psalmist beautifully makes mention of this scribe when he says: *My tongue is the pen of a scribe who writes swiftly*.[2] For the tongue of the prophet was indeed the pen of a swift scribe, because **/875/** what the Lord taught him without any lapse of time through inward illumination, this he declared to men outwardly in time through the service of his tongue.

By his name too, which means 'helper',[3] Ezra openly stands for the Lord. For it is he by whom alone the people of the faithful are constantly liberated from tribulations and, as though from captivity in Babylon to freedom in Jerusalem, are brought from the 'confusion' of the vices to the 'peace'[4] and serenity of the virtues as they advance by the steps of meritorious deeds. In the second psalm of the same *anabathmoi*[5] (i.e. of 'the Ascents'), the psalmist proclaims to all those who strive for the highest under whose leadership they ought to strive *[310]* to attain it when he suggests: *My help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth*.[6] In his actions too Ezra was a figure of the Lord, since Ezra himself led back no small portion of the people from the captivity to Jerusalem and at the same time conveyed money and vessels consecrated to God for the glory of his temple and when through his pontifical authority[7] he purged these people of their

1 Heb. 10:16; Jer. 31:33.

2 Ps. 45:1 (44:2).

3 Jerome *Epistula* 53 (CSEL 54: 61.19).

4 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18; 121.9–10).

5 Greek *ana-* 'up' + *bathmos* 'step' = *anabathmos*, 'steps going up' or 'ascent'. Psalms 120–34 (119–33 in the Vulgate) are known as the Songs of Ascent.

6 Ps. 121:2 (120:2).

7 *pontificali auctoritate*. This is the first of several references to Ezra as *pontifex* (see also *In Ezr*. 2.1587, 1627, 1708, 1821, 1950; and 3.1078, 1134, where I have chosen not to translate the word), a term usually translated as 'high priest', though that office is one Ezra is believed not to have held: see Grabbe 1998: 26. My view is that Bede's use of the term is meant to underscore Ezra's pre-eminent priestly authority, evident in his role as teacher and corrector of other priests, a role which for Bede called to mind the duties of a bishop, as his telling gloss '*pontifex*, i.e. an archbishop' (see *In Ezr*. 2.1587) makes clear: for discussion, see Introduction, pp. xxxiv–xxxv; also DeGregorio 2004: 18–20. Meyvaert 1997: 285 takes this occurrence of *pontificali* as support for his idea that Bede subjected *On Ezra and Nehemiah* to a series of revisions, arguing that it represents the sole instance of the term *pontifex* in the commentary and must therefore be a relic from an earlier redaction of the work 'seemingly overlooked in the course of revision'. Meyvaert assumes here that Bede, early in his career, believed Ezra to be a high priest, but later realized he was mistaken. None of this appears to be credible, however.

foreign wives. What all this suggests with regard to what is done or is going to be done in the Church by the Lord is clear to the learned reader, but we will take pains to make them accessible to the less learned as well.

For the fact that Ezra goes up from Babylon and some of the children of Israel and descendants of the priests and the Levites go up with him signifies the merciful provision of our Redeemer by which, appearing in the flesh, he entered into the 'confusion' of this world though he himself was free from the confusion of sins so that, when he returned, he might free us from all 'confusion' and lead us with him into the restfulness of celestial 'peace'.[1] **/900/** In the present Church, we have received the pledge of this eternal peace from the Lord who said: *Peace I leave with you; I give you my peace*.[2] That is, 'I leave temporal peace on earth for those who are travelling in it; I give eternal peace to those who arrive in the celestial homeland'. In this regard, it is well said that Ezra began to go up from Babylon in the first month and in the fifth month arrived in Jerusalem with the descendants of the exiles whom he was leading. For the reason that the journey from Babylonia to Jerusalem is completed in four months is that through the four books of the Holy Gospels we learn the faith and the sacraments of the truth,[3] whereby we ought, with the Lord's assistance, to be snatched from the captivity of the ancient enemy and so ascend to *the freedom of the glory of the children of God*.[4] In these same four books are contained the precepts of the actions by which we can arrive, as though by daily steps, at the promised heavenly rewards.

Nor is it without the figure of a mystery that he began to go up from Babylon on the first day of the month and again on the first day of the month arrived in Jerusalem. For the beginning of the month, in which the moon is believed to borrow new light from the sun,[5] designates the new beginning of a celestial gift. And it is fitting that it was on the first day of the first month that Ezra went up from Babylon with those whom he was releasing from captivity because the beginning of our holy way of life, in which we renounce Satan and his

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18; 121.9–10).

2 John 14:27.

3 Cf. Bede *De tab*. 2 (89.1846–49).

4 Rom. 8:21.

5 See above, *In Ezr*. 1.1116–18 and the accompanying note, for an explanation of this natural phenomenon.

kingdom,[1] is brought about in us through the illumination of divine mercy; and that it was on the first day of the fifth month that he arrived in Jerusalem because it also occurs in us not through our own freedom of will but through the illumination of divine light that, after hearing the prophetic words of the Gospels, we are incorporated into the members of the Holy Church. And a beautiful **/925/** and wholesome custom has developed in the Church through the teaching of the Fathers that the mystery of the four Gospels is explained and their *[311]* beginnings are recited to those who are being catechized.[2] Likewise, Ezra, accompanied by those who had been liberated from the enemies, arrives in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month because when, having fulfilled the four precepts of the Holy Gospel,[3] we enter the celestial kingdom as if we were celebrating a new beginning of the month, because we already discern the joys of the new light in the *sun of righteousness*[4] and, as though after four months of bright action that we have spent on the road of life, we spend the fifth month of eternal reward in the light of the heavenly homeland.

[7:9] And on the first day, it says, **of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the gracious hand of his God upon him**, that is, confirmed by grace and divine protection, through which he would successfully complete the journey he had begun. Similarly, in the mystical sense, the *mediator of God and men*[5] came into the Church

1 On the renunciation of Satan during the rite of baptism, see above *In Ezr*. 1.1061–67 and the accompanying note.

2 This passage has a close parallel at *De tab*. 2 (89.1849–55), where it is clearer that the liturgical rite being described is that of the *apertio aurium* or 'opening of the ears' (see esp. lines 1852–53 and Holder's translation, 101, n. 2). One of the preparatory rites of those being baptized at Easter, this ceremony involved the reading of the opening verses of each of the four Gospels to the attending catechumens. This was done, Bede explains, 'so that from then on they [i.e. the catechumens] may know and remember which books, and how many, [contain] the words by which they ought chiefly to be instructed in the true faith' – *De tab*. 2 (89.1853–55); trans. Holder 101. Evidence for the ceremony survives from as early as the third century in Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition*. For general discussion, see de Puniet 1924; for reference to Bede, see Ó Carragáin 1994: 6–7, n. 24.

3 'four precepts of the Holy Gospel' = *quattuor sancti evangelii praeceptis*. The phrase is odd, and it is possible that the text should read *quattuor sancti evangelii librorum praeceptis*, 'the precepts of the four books of the Holy Gospel'. Cf. *In Ezr*. 2.907: *quattuor libros sancti evangelii*.

4 Mal. 4:2.

5 1 Tim. 2:5.

according to the gracious hand of his God upon him, i.e. according to the disposition of the divine power that was in him. For *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ*.[1] This hand was on him in accordance with the fact that he became a man. This is why he says: *The Father is greater than I*.[2] For greater than Christ's humanity is the divinity not only of the Father but of Christ himself and the Holy Spirit too, which is one. Having been exalted in suffering by this hand of divine power, he ascended to the walls of the heavenly city and revealed the pathway of ascent[3] to his faithful ones who humbly follow him.

[7:10] For Ezra prepared his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do and to teach in Israel its commandments and judgements. Oh how great **/950/** is the virtue of this utterance, what sublime merit that a man should prepare his heart to serve the divine will and be able to say: *My heart is prepared, Oh God, my heart is prepared; I will sing and recite a psalm to the Lord*,[4] i.e. 'I will both exult in the Lord with all my mind and will accomplish his ordinances by carrying them out in deeds'. Thus he prepared his heart to discover and rewrite the Law of the Lord that the devouring fire had destroyed;[5] he also prepared his heart to first fulfil the Law himself by carrying it out and only then open his mouth to teach others.[6] In the same way, this can manifestly apply to the Lord Jesus. For he prepared his own heart to discover the Lord's Law because he divinely provided for himself a man to assume, such that he would be not only without sin but also full of grace and truth,[7] because, with no law of sin fighting against him, he would keep God's Law without any contradiction of mind or flesh.[8] Hence he says in a psalm: *At the beginning of the book it is written about me that I should do your will: Oh my God, I have desired it, and desired your law in the midst of my heart*.[9] In the same way, the Lord 'investigated'

1 2 Cor. 5:19.

2 John 14:28.

3 *ascensionis iter*: a phrase perhaps borrowed from Gregory *Regula pastoralis* 3.23 (PL 76:92).

4 Ps. 57:7 (56:8)

5 4 Esdras 14:9–48; and cf. above *In Ezr.* 2.791–96 and the accompanying note.

6 Cf. *In Ezr*. 2.1056–57 and 1648–51, on the theme of Ezra as a model teacher.

7 Cf. John 1:14.

8 In other words, by becoming incarnate and thereby providing a human nature for his divinity, Christ himself was the most perfect fulfillment of the Law possible.

9 Ps. 40:7–8 (39:8–9).

God's Law in that he rejected the traditions of the Pharisees and taught how Holy Scripture was to be understood mystically and what spiritual secrets it concealed beneath the veil of the letter,[1] and because he showed that the decrees of the Gospel that he himself brought to the world were more perfect and more pleasing to God the Father than the ones that he had sent earlier through Moses.[2] Hence he himself says: *You have heard that it was said to them of old, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I tell you: Love your enemies; do good to those who persecute you*,[3] and other things of this sort. *[312]*

[7:11] /975/ This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, and so on. This Artaxerxes, who in his own way pays homage to God's temple and priests with a most devout mind and offers willing service to him, like his predecessor Darius signifies Christian rulers.[4] Nor should one marvel if we have said that the successors of Cyrus, who caused the Lord's temple and city to be built, who loved and assisted his servants and Law, contain a figure of Christian kings, since the Lord himself said through the prophet that Cyrus came as a figure of his own Son and deigned that Cyrus should be honoured through his name: *Thus the Lord says to my anointed Cyrus*,[5] and the other things about him that we have spoken about more extensively above.[6]

[7:12] 'Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a most learned scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Greetings. He names him **a most learned scribe of the Law of the God of heaven** because the reputation of his divine virtue had reached even the king himself. Through this virtue, he restored the Law set ablaze by the Chaldeans in the same words as previously although in a different script.[7] And he himself names him **the God of heaven** to distinguish him from those gods whom he realized the foolish madness of wretched people had

1 *tegmen litterae*: this phrase appears in Gregory *Moralia in Job* 2.36.59 (CCSL 143:97.13), in a passage that deals similarly with the blinding literalism of the Jews.

2 On the New Law's superseding the Old, cf. Bede *Hom*. 1.2 (10.107–33).

3 Matt. 5:43–44.

4 Cf. *In Ezr*. 2.263–67.

5 Is. 45:1. In this verse, Isaiah calls Cyrus *christo meo*, 'my anointed'; in Latin and Greek, 'christ' translates the Hebrew word *māšîah*, 'anointed one, messiah': cf. above *In Ezr*. 1.148–61 and the accompanying note.

6 Cf. *In Ezr*. 1.108–215.

7 4 Esdras 14:9–48; and cf. above *In Ezr*. 2.791–96 and 813–17, along with the accompanying notes.

invented from dead men or indeed non-existing ones.[1] I hope the reader will not object if I briefly run through the text of this letter and observe the extent to which it accords with the character of Christian kings.

[7:13] ' It has been decreed by me', it says, **'that whomever it pleases in my kingdom from the people of Israel and from the priests and the Levites to go to Jerusalem, may go with you'.** He gives permission to all who wish to go to Jerusalem, but he does not compel anyone to go. Christian rulers also **/1000/** force no one, so that the desire for faith is not uncertain and doubtful, but allow all whom it pleases in their kingdom to worship Christ.

[7:14] 'From before the king and his seven counsellors you are sent to visit Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand'. In the Book of Esther also we read that it was a custom of the kings of the Persians, in all things that had to be done or decided, *[313]* to make use of the advice of seven wise men.[2] Now the faithful make use of seven counsellors when in all that they do they follow the precepts and decrees of Divine Scripture, about which the psalmist says: *The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried by fire, purged from the earth, refined seven times*,[3] i.e. perfected by the holy illumination of the sevenfold Spirit.

If it seems incongruous to anyone that the counsellors of this Persian king, through whom the people and prophets of the Lord are sent back to their homeland when the captivity was relaxed, can symbolize something good in the Holy Church, let him read the works of the Fathers, who have stated that the deeds or misfortunes of the reprobate kings Saul and Jechonia (Jehoiachin) designate in a figurative way the most holy works of our Redeemer, understanding by the death of Saul, who was anointed as king but was slaughtered as a due reward for his wicked crimes,[4] the innocent death of Christ the king, and typologically relating the removal of Jehoiachin from Judah to Babylon[5] that he endured because of his sins[6] to the grace of our same

1 Cf. Bede *Hom*. 1.20 (142.47–53).

2 Esth. 1:13–14.

3 Ps. 12:6 (11:7).

4 Cf. 1 Sam. 31:3–13. Cf. Question 6 in Bede's *On Eight Questions*, trans. Holder 156–58.

5 Reading *in Babilonem* for *et Bethleem*: see Appendix 1.

6 Cf. 2 Kings 24:6–16; 2 Chron. 36:9–10.

Redeemer, whereby, leaving the Jews behind because of their perfidy, he deigned to travel to save nations throughout the world.[1] These Fathers have taught that the words or deeds of Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar should be understood typologically as enemies of the Church. **/1025/** Pharaoh, for instance, ordered that the male infants of God's people be killed in the river and the female ones be spared,[2] because the devil desires to extinguish what is strong and firm[3] in us and feed what is unstable and frail.[4] Likewise, Nebuchadnezzar commanded all the peoples subject to him to fall down and worship his statue when they heard the sound of the instruments and the musicians,[5] and the devil is eager to turn humankind away from uprightness of mind through the pleasure of earthly pomp and to subvert the hearts of the deceived into following *the covetousness which is the service of idols*.[6] If, then, the wicked works of the reprobate have stood as a figure not just of evil but also of good things, why could not the good deeds and words of good men that are contained in a prophetic book prefigure the good actions of those who follow them? Likewise, let us consider the works of Saint Augustine, who said that even the seven husbands of the one woman who died without children, concerning whom the Sadducees tested the Lord by denying resurrection, hold a definite figure of ecclesiastical mystery, and taught that the woman, her sterility and death, and the death of the husbands too, are figures of remarkable things,[7] despite the fact that neither the Lord himself *[314]* nor any of the evangelists recounted this story in their own person; on the contrary, these were the things which the impious in their wicked speech had brought forward against the Lord but which the evangel-

1 Bede addresses the question of evil deeds symbolizing good things and vice versa in two other works: *In Sam.* 2 (91.993–92.1026), which closely parallels the present passage, and *In Tob.* (5.3–8). See also *In Gen.* 4 (236.1516–20), where Bede's chief source is Gregory *Moralia in Job* 4, Praef. 4 (CCSL 143:161.117–18), although the idea was widespread among the Fathers: see de Lubac 2000: 2.64–67. See too Bede's remarks in *On Eight Questions*, trans. Holder 157.

2 Cf. Ex. 1:22.

3 Reading *et firma* for *forma*: see Appendix 1. Another possibility is suggested by Rabanus Maurus, who, in quoting this passage, has *fortia in nobis opera exstinguere*: see *Expositio in librum Esther* (PL 109:638D).

4 Cf. Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 136.17 (CCSL 40:1975.12–15).

5 Cf. Dan. 3:5 and Jerome *In Esaiam* 2.5.11/12 (CCSL 73:72.35–38).

6 Col. 3:5.

7 Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 65.1 (CCSL 39:838.24–839.51).

ists set down in their writings because of his most holy reply.[1]

Ezra, therefore, is sent **from before the king and his seven counsellors** to visit Judea and Jerusalem. Worldly rulers also, once converted to the faith and strengthened too by the exhortations of the Holy Scriptures, **/1050/** desire the Lord Christ to come to save his Church and assemble it from the nations[2] through the daily 'help' that Ezra's name signifies,[3] proclaiming with an insistent voice: *Oh Lord God of virtues, turn now and look down from heaven and see and visit this vineyard, and direct that which your right hand has planted*.[4] It says, **to visit Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand.** For the Law of God was in Ezra's hand because he not only preached it with his tongue but fulfilled it by his action. Our Lord too, appearing in the flesh, held the Law in his hand, not only because he followed the precepts of the Law in all things but also because he had the edicts of the Law in his power, both once establishing the Law through Moses as he desired, and now altering the same Law through himself as he desired and bringing it to a more perfect state. Hence he said: *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago*, … *but I tell you*.[5] And it is remarkable that an expression which the prophets were wont to use is found in this letter of Artaxerxes, as it says that the Law of God is **in the hand** of his servant. For it is written: *The word of the Lord came to be in the hand of Haggai the prophet*;[6] *and the Lord has done that which he spoke in the hand of his servant Elijah*;[7] *and the Lord testified to them in Israel and in Judah by the hand of all the prophets*[8] – no doubt, because prophets used to preach those things that are of God to everyone no less by acting than by speaking. It goes on:

[7:15] 'And you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his counsellors have freely given to the God of Israel, whose tabernacle is in Jerusalem. /1075/ Note the faith and wisdom of the king and his counsellors, who understood that the gifts that they wished to offer the Lord should be offered rather by one who had the Law of God in

1 Matt. 22:25–28.
2 Cf. Ps. 107:2–3 (106:2–3); also Bede *De templ*. 1 (172.1032–35).
3 Jerome *Epistula* 53 (CSEL 54:461.19).
4 Ps. 80:14–15 (79:15–16).
5 Matt. 5:21–22.
6 Hag. 1:1.
7 2 Kings 10:10.
8 2 Kings 17:13.

his hand, i.e. who fulfilled it in deed. And it is remarkable how faithfully and learnedly the king says that the Lord, whom above he had called **the God of heaven**,[1] has a 'tabernacle' in Jerusalem. For a tabernacle[2] is something we often use on a journey.[3] And the God of heaven has a tabernacle in Jerusalem because he who has his eternal seat in heaven himself deigns to dwell for a time with the saints who are *[315]* pilgrims in this Church. Hence there is that saying from the Apocalypse: *Behold the tabernacle of God is with men*.[4] But since the blessed Ezra represented the type not only of preachers of the Holy Church, of whom he himself was one, but also of the Lord Saviour to whose members he belonged, we in a sense offer our gifts through him whose help we require in all things so that the good things we do may be acceptable to God the Father. For *No one*, he says, *comes to the Father except through me*;[5] and John says concerning him: For *he himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins*.[6]

[7:16–18] 'And all the silver and gold whatsoever you may find in the whole province of Babylon, and that the people are willing to offer, and from those priests who have willingly offered to the house of their God which is in Jerusalem – take freely and buy diligently with this money calves, rams and lambs, and their sacrifices and libations, and offer them upon the altar of the temple of your God, which is in Jerusalem. But if it seems good to you and your brethren to do something with the rest of the silver and gold, do it according to the will of your God. The history is clear, in that **/1100/** the reason the king and his counsellors[7] gave money to Ezra to bring to the Lord's temple, and the reason they also wished others to give, was so that victims, sacrifices and libations might be bought from this money to be offered upon the altar of God, and if any of the money was left over, this was to be spent in no other way except according to the will of God. Here we should note too that when it speaks of the priests who were going to make offerings for the house of their God, it plainly teaches that,

1 Ezra 7:12.

2 Tabernacle here means a tent or temporary shelter: see above *In Ezr*. 1.1037–40 and the accompanying note.

3 Cf. below *In Ezr*. 1.1097–98.

4 Rev. 21:3.

5 John 14:6.

6 1 John 2:2.

7 Reading *consiliatores* for *consialiatores*: see Appendix 1.

although some of the priests and Levites went up to Jerusalem with Ezra, yet others stayed behind in Babylonia with the remainder of their people.

The allegorical meaning is clear too because the reason the faithful want their good deeds to shine forth in the Holy Church is so that as a result of these deeds they too might deserve to have a share with the saints and others might profit from their examples. For it is as though our sacrifices, libations and victims are bought with gold and silver for offering to the Lord when, having seen the brightness of our works, our neighbours are turned to the duty of devotion by which they themselves also by living well are consecrated to the Lord. But if any of the silver and gold was left over and was not due to be spent on the offerings, he commanded that it too be administered according to God's will and pleasure. For there are certain virtues of the saints which are very illustrious but cannot be presented to everyone as a model for good works and can be recounted solely to glorify God's grace, such as that Daniel and Jeremiah prophesied as children,[1] that John did the same when he was not yet born,[2] that Cornelius received the Holy
[316] Spirit along with his family before he was baptized,[3] and as are innumerable miracles of the saints which, like **/1125/** silver or gold, shine forth in the house of the Lord. Yet offerings to be put upon the altar cannot be bought from the same silver and gold, because when we hear of such things, we ought indeed to marvel at them as at divine things but not as things we could possibly imitate.[4] The word 'sacrifices', properly speaking, referred to offerings of produce of the earth, such as bread, flour, and ears of corn, while 'libations' referred to offerings of wine and other liquids.

[7:19] 'The vessels also that are entrusted to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver them before the God of Jerusalem. Not only silver and gold of diverse weight but also vessels are entrusted to Ezra to be brought to Jerusalem. But our Lord also, whom Ezra here represents as a type, has brought before God the Father in the heavenly Jerusalem all the vessels that are entrusted to him by men, among which there is Paul *the chosen vessel*,[5] and those whom Paul calls *the*

1 Dan. 1:11–13; Jer. 1:6–13.
2 Luke 1:41.
3 Cf. Acts 10:44.
4 For similar wariness about imitation of the saints, see below, *In Ezr.* 3.1427–29.
5 Acts 9:15.

vessels of mercy.[1] About these vessels he himself says in the Gospel: *Or how else can anyone enter the house of a strong man and steal his vessels unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house*.[2] In fact the king of Babylon (i.e. the devil wickedly ruling over the reprobate) was strong but, conquered and bound by the Lord, he lost those vessels (i.e. the hearts of the elect) which he unjustly possessed, nor, when the Lord carried off these vessels and returned them to the heavenly city whose very own they were, was he able to oppose him.

[7:21–22] 'And I, King Artaxerxes, have ordered and decreed to all the guardians of the public treasury who are beyond the river, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you, /1150/ you are to give it without delay, up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cores of grain, a hundred baths of wine. Christian rulers also order all who are subjected to them to give whatever our Lord and *Pontifex* may ask of them without any hesitation, holding back nothing at all; rather, let them be swift to carry out the commands of the divine will. Let them give him gold in the confession of the true faith, grain in the display of good works, wine in the fervour of love, and oil in the love and cheerfulness of mercy. And all these things to the number of one hundred are ordered to be given to the high priest and scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, i.e. to the Lord Jesus Christ, who, bringing down heavenly commandments to us from the Father, has promised heavenly rewards in his Father's house to those who follow them so that,[3] for nothing other than the thanks of heavenly reward, we may press onwards with good undertakings. For the number one hundred, which in calculating with the fingers passes *[317]* from the left to the right,[4] customarily designates those joys that are in the right hand of the judge, i.e. in eternal life. Now it is related that a talent can be measured in three different ways: the least of fifty *librae*,[5] the middle of seventy-two *librae*, and the highest of one

1 Rom. 9:23.

2 Matt. 12:29.

3 Reading *ut* for *et*: see Appendix 1.

4 Cf. *In Ezr*. 3.221–24; also *De tab*. 2 (85.1688–91). A reference to the finger reckoning technique of *computus*, in which the left hand was used for representing units and tens, the right for hundreds and thousands. Bede explains this counting technique at length in *DTR* 1 (268.1– 273.107); for discussion see the notes to Wallis's translation, pp. 254–63.

5 *lībra* = the Roman pound.

hundred and twenty *librae*; a core is of thirty pecks,[1] a bate[2] (which is also called an *oephi*) the tenth part of a core, i.e. three pecks.[3]

[7:22–23] '…and salt without measure. Let all that belongs to the cult of the God of heaven be granted with diligence in the house of the God of heaven. It is known to all that salt designates wisdom,[4] which is why in everyday speech obtuse people are called 'unsalted'; but it depends what kind of salt it is. For on the one hand the Lord ordains through the Law that salt should be offered at every sacrifice,[5] and says in **/1175/** the Gospel, *Have salt in you, and have peace among you*;[6] on the other hand, it is not in vain that we read that David slew the Edomites in the valley of the salt-pits.[7] Doubtless this is because we are commanded to offer the salt of heavenly wisdom (in which catechumens are initiated)[8] in all the sacrifices of our good deeds; but David beats down the salt-pits of the valleys together with their inhabitants because Christ destroys the lowest type, i.e. worldly wisdom, along with those who follow it. Consequently, it is here rightly ordered that salt be granted without measure with diligence in the house of the God of heaven, no doubt because it is necessary that whatever wisdom anyone has, he must display it all in doing the will of his Creator. And it should be recalled that in the earlier parts of this book[9] we read that the Samaritans who wrote to the other Artaxerxes said that they were mindful of the salt that they had eaten in the palace,[10] and that for this

1 *modius* = the Roman corn-measure, a peck.

2 *batus* = a Hebrew measure for liquids, containing about nine gallons. In *On the Temple*, Bede defines it as follows: 'A bate is a measure of the Hebrews, which they themselves call a bath, which holds three bushels; the same is true of an oephi which they also call an epha, but the oephi has to do with the measurement of various grains: wheat, barley, and pulse; but a bate is used for liquids: wine, oil and water', *De templ.* 2 (212.797–8); trans. Connolly 90.

3 Cf. Isidore *Etymologiae* 16.25.22; 16.26.12, 17.

4 Cf. Mark 9:50, Col. 4:6; also Gregory *Regula pastoralis* 2.4 (PL 76:31D) and *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 1.8.8 (CCSL 142:106.188–91).

5 Lev. 2:13.

6 Mark 9:50.

7 Ps. 60:2 (59:2); 1 Chron. 18:12.

8 In the Roman baptismal rite, salt was placed on the tongues of the catechumens before they entered the church to receive the sacrament: see Isidore *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 2.21.3–4 (CCSL 113:96.25–97.36), who in this passage also equates salt with wisdom.

9 See Ezra 4:14–15, along with Bede's comments at *In Ezr.* 1.1783–94.

10 'had eaten the salt of the palace', i.e. have been in the pay of the court and thus are subservient to the king.

reason they were unable to allow God's temple and city to be built against the king's welfare. But now this Artaxerxes orders all the guardians of the public treasury to give (among other gifts) their own salt for the house of the God of heaven, as much as was needed. For in the earlier passage, we learn that heretics are sometimes motivated to wage war upon the Church through a fraudulent human taste for wisdom, whereas in this passage it is implied that, when wise men are converted to the faith, they often aid the faith itself through the disciplines of this same secular wisdom when they use it to prevail more soundly over its adversaries.

[7:24] 'And we also make it known to you regarding all the priests and the Levites and the singers and the door-keepers and the Nathinnites and the ministers of the house of this God, that you have no authority /1200/ to impose tax or tribute or duty on them. From this privilege by which the priests, the Levites, and the other servants of God's house are made exempt from taxes, it is clearly shown that the remaining ordinary people of the children of Israel paid tribute to the king when they arrived in their homeland, and we learn that the king acted with discerning foresight in every way, so that those who were always occupied in divine service might be freed from servitude to him, and those who had no possessions of their own in the land but lived from the tithes of the people might not be forced by anyone to pay tribute. From all these provisions the king is quite clearly shown not only to have loved but also to have learned very well what the practice of divine service demands. *[318]*

[7:25–26] 'And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which is in your hand, appoint judges and magistrates and let them judge all the people who are beyond the river, that is those who know the law of your God; but teach freely those who do not know it. And anyone who does not diligently carry out the law of your God and the law of the king shall be condemned, either to death, or to exile, or to the confiscation of his property, or surely to prison.' The king repeats the words that he had said and confirms the truth that he recognized by repeating his words. For above he said that God's law was in Ezra's hand, but now he says that the wisdom of his God is in his hand, surely because God's law is wisdom, as the psalmist says: *The mouth of the righteous man shall ponder wisdom, and his tongue shall speak judgement. The law of his God is in his heart*.[1] And the righteous man has

1 Ps. 37:30–31 (36:30–31).

God's law and wisdom in his own hand so long as in everything he does and says he shows that he is mindful of the divine will. The literal sense, therefore, is clear, **/1225/** and the spiritual interpretation is also clear because our Lord and Saviour has the wisdom of God in his hand. For he himself is the power of God and the wisdom of God[1] who alone has the authority to establish judges and heads of Churches who can judge all matters according to his will and preach his faith to the uninstructed throughout the world. And everyone who treats the decrees of that law with contempt will be punished either now or in the life to come, each according to the measure of his own sin. Therefore Artaxerxes, writing of these things to Ezra and conveying in his letter the love he had towards the practice of religion, clearly expresses what devotion Christian kings in later days would have and what they would do with respect to the true faith. For this reason, we have taken care briefly to recall his letter (although we have omitted some details) so that the reader may recognize the extent to which it accords with those things which Christian rulers, now that the grace of the Gospel has been revealed, have done for the peace of the Holy Church. Indeed, we can relate the person of Ezra in a figurative way not only to the Lord Christ but also to any leader or teacher in the Church, to whom kings and rulers have often sent letters on behalf of the state of the faithful. And rightly Ezra himself, to whom this letter was given, subsequently bursts forth in praise of God, saying:

[319] **[7:27] Blessed be the Lord the God of our fathers, who has put it in the king's heart to glorify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.** And who would hesitate to confess that those words of the king were holy and mystical, when a prophet[2] tells us that they were divinely inspired and declares that the house of the Lord was glorified by him? **[7:28] And I, strengthened by the hand of the Lord my God which was on me, /1250/ gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me**. He calls **the hand of God** the power of God by which he performs all things. And it is right that the one who gathers them in order to lead them from Babylon to Jerusalem is he who, we learn, himself has the hand of God upon him to strengthen him, no doubt because a person is made competent to bring others to God through his teaching only when he himself is first strengthened inwardly in mind through his grace against all that impedes the holy work.

1 1 Cor. 1:24.
2 I.e. Ezra.

[8:1–14] These, then, are the heads of the families and genealogies of those who came up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes. From the descendants of Phinehas: Gershom, and so on until the end of the genealogy. He carefully enumerates the leaders who came up with him from Babylon and unfolds their genealogy. He takes pains too to add their total, which reached 1,440, to suggest that the names of those who come up from the 'confusion'[1] of this world are contained in the book of life of the Lamb.[2] But also all teachers (i.e. the heads of the families) of God's people also receive increases in their eternal reward commensurate with the number of souls they have acquired for the Lord, according to that parable in the Gospel wherein the good and wise servant said: *Master, your pound has earned ten pounds*, and the master replied: *Take charge of ten cities*,[3] which is to say 'appear more glorious in the heavenly kingdom because of the life of those whom you have taught'.[4]

[8:15] I gathered them to the river that flows down towards Ahava. I do not recall having read this place-name anywhere else. But since **/1275/** in the following lines it is written, **There, by the Ahava River, I proclaimed a fast**,[5] and a bit further on, **On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava River**,[6] it seems probable that the Ahava is a river and that some other river flows down into it, and that Ezra gathered those who went up with him at the place where these rivers joined. Josephus, however, puts 'Euphrates' in place of this name.[7] So the Ahava can be thought of not improperly as some tributary of the Euphrates.

[8:15–16] And we stayed there three days, and I sought among the people and the priests for sons of Levi, and I found none there. So I sent Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, and so on. Ezra fittingly arranged that before he began so great a journey, he might carefully provide for himself a sufficient supply of ministers of God's house in order to carry *[320]*

1 Babylon = 'confusion of sinners': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18).

2 Cf. Rev. 21:27.

3 Luke 19:16–19.

4 That is to say, teachers of the faith will be judged on the basis of the virtues – or lack of them – of those for whom they have been responsible: on this theme, cf. *In Ezr.* 1.559–67 and 2.629–32, 1370–80, 1479–82, 1517–22.

5 Ezra 8:21.

6 Ezra 8:31.

7 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.5.2.

out those things which were necessary for the needs of the temple when he arrived in Jerusalem.

[8:17–18] And I sent them to Iddo, who is the leader in the region of Casphia,[1] **and I put in their mouth the words that they should speak to Iddo and his brethren the Nathinnites in the region of Casphia, so that they might bring us attendants for the house of our God. And through the gracious hand of our God upon us they brought us a most learned man of the descendants of Mahli son of Levi son of Israel.** *The Caspian Sea*, as Orosius writes, *rises from the ocean in the northern region, and its two coastlands in the vicinity of the ocean are thought to be deserted and uncultivated. From here toward the south it extends through a long channel until, spread out over a wide expanse, it terminates at the base of the Caucasian Mountains*. It has on the east up to the Ocean many *nations of the Hyrcanians and Scythians* **/1300/** *who wander over a wide area because of the widespread barrenness of the land*; on the west it has many nations. *But the* largest[2] *region is generally called Albania*; *the more distant region near the sea and the Caspian Mountains* is named *the land of the Amazons*.[3] It is worth noting here that although historians write 'Caspian', Ezra in this passage calls it 'Casphia'. For the Hebrews, not having the letter 'p', use the letter 'ph' in Greek or barbarian names, as in 'Phetrus' or 'Philatus'.[4] Thus, as a result of the captivity of the Assyrians and Chaldeans, the descendants of Israel are shown to have reached even as far as the region of Casphia, since Ezra sent to that place for ministers of the Lord's house to be brought to him – namely Levites and Nathinnites, whom

1 In the Hebrew Bible this word appears as 'Casiphia', location unknown, but usually presumed to be in Babylonia: see Herion 1992. Bede is misled by the Latin spelling 'Casphia' into identifying this unknown place with the Caspian Sea.

2 *plurima*. This word appears to be a corruption; the original text of Orosius has *proxima*, 'nearest'. Bede may have found the word *plurima* in his text of Orosius and out of respect for the text simply copied what he found; as Colgrave and Mynors ('Textual Introduction' to *HE*, p. xxxix) point out, Bede's practice was to transcribe a text 'very accurately, including even its errors, and the result was faithfully transmitted by the transcribers of the finished work'.

3 Orosius *Historiarum adversos paganos* 1.2.47–50 (CSEL 5:20.7–21.3).

4 Bede makes the same claim about Hebrew pronunciation in two other works: see *In Luc.* 2 (133.1297–1302) and *Retract. Act.* 9 (138.39–44) and 16 (151.42–46). The idea, which he probably derived from Jerome *In Danielem* 4.11.44/45 (CCSL 75A:935.468–71) and Isidore *Etymologiae* 9.2.58, is misleading, for Hebrew does have the letter P, but after a vowel it changes to PH.

Josephus calls 'sacred servants'.[1] Concerning these people it should be noted that they were living very freely and peacefully even among foreigners, since, at Ezra's command or requests, they were immediately able to appoint so great an army. For the catalogue of them that follows[2] shows that there were 258 men chosen in that expedition; when these were added, Ezra is found to have had a total of nearly 1,700 men in his army.

[8:21] And I proclaimed there a fast by the Ahava River, so that we might humble ourselves before the Lord our God and ask him for a safe journey for ourselves and our children, and so on until it says, **So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and it turned out well for us.**[3] This is an example of fasting and praying when we want to begin *[321]* something of great virtue, both because a faithful hope in the Lord never fails and also because is it impossible for us not to obtain what is just if we seek it from the merciful Helper with self-control and prayers combined with faith. **/1325/** But we should pay careful attention to the fact that it teaches that fasting comes first and only then does prayer follow. For it says first, **And I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before the Lord**, and then adds, **and so that we might ask him for a safe journey for us and our children,** and so on until the final sentence, **So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and it turned out well for us**. For it is fitting in every way that whoever sets out to beseech God's mercy should first show himself worthy of being heard by living more continently, so that when petitioning the Lord he need not doubt that the things he asks for will turn out well for him.[4]

[8:24–25] And I set apart twelve of the leaders of the priests, Sherebiah, **Hashabiah, and with them ten of their brethren, and I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels for the consecration**[5] **of the house of our God, which the king and his counsellors and his princes and all the Israelites who had been found there had offered.** It has frequently been said that the silver and gold and the vessels that were being sent from Babylon to Jerusalem designate

1 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.5.1.

2 Cf. Ezra 8:18–20.

3 Ezra 8:23.

4 Cf. Bede *Epist. Cath.* (185.77–95); on Bede and prayer, see DeGregorio 1999.

5 Bede's text has *consecrationis*; the Vulgate has *consecrata*. On Bede's text of Ezra–Nehemiah, see Introduction, pp. xvii–xxi.

souls that are converted to the Lord from the confusion and sins of this world.[1] So it is fitting that Ezra entrusts vessels of this kind to the priests to convey them to Jerusalem, because all who desire to join the community of the Holy Church must be washed in baptism and consecrated to the Lord through the hands of priests. Equally, those who by sinning have been drawn away from the Church's fellowship into the devil's servitude, and who by remaining in their sins have fallen into the captivity of the king of Babylon, must be reconciled to the Holy Church by doing penance through the office of a priest. **/1350/** And it is well that there are twelve priests to whom this charge was assigned because there are twelve apostles by whose teaching the Church was first established throughout the world and by whose successors it does not cease to be built until the end of the world.[2] In keeping with which, Ezra said this to these same priests:

[8:28–29] 'You are the holy ones of the Lord, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold which has been freely offered to the Lord the God of your fathers. Be watchful and guard them.' For teachers of the Church must never forget the sacred state by which they were consecrated to the Lord through the Holy Spirit on the day of redemption, and which they prepare their hearers to receive as well. In this way those who have already been offered to the Lord through the rudi-
[322] ments of the faith should be strengthened more and more through the examples and admonitions of those who have preceded them in the faith and may become worthy to enter the heavenly city. These teachers must be vigilant in all things and take care that none of the souls entrusted to them (i.e. the Lord's vessels) may perish; rather, they must lead them to the shrine of the holy city without losing any.

[8:29] 'Be watchful', he says, **'and guard them until you weigh them out before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and the heads of the families of Israel in Jerusalem and into the treasure chamber of the house of the Lord'.** We weigh out silver and gold and vessels of the kind we have received from Ezra before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and the heads of the families of Israel in Jerusalem and in the treasure chamber of God's house when, **/1375/** by educating and teaching we show that those whom the heavenly plan has entrusted to

1 Babylon = 'confusion of sins': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:62.18).

2 On the theme of the Church's apostolic foundations, cf. *Epist. Cath.* (229.161–8); *Hom.* 2.1 (186.73–74); and *De templ.* 2 (228.1402–24).

us are such as may be found blameless and fit for the treasure chamber of the celestial court, that is, for the abode of inner peace and light – and, what is more, not in the opinion of ordinary human beings who could easily be deceived, but by the examination of the blessed apostles and other sublime men who with the Lord are going to pass judgement on our deeds. For these people are rightly to be understood as the rulers of the priests and the Levites and the heads of the families of Israel (i.e. of men or souls who see God),[1] about whom the psalmist says to the Lord: *You will appoint them as rulers over all the earth*;[2] and about whom Solomon says in praise of the Church: *Noble in the gates is her husband, when he shall sit with the elders of the land*.[3] 'In the gates' means at the sorting out of the Last Judgement.

[8:31–33] So we set out from the River Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month to go to Jerusalem; and the hand of our God was upon us, and delivered us from the hand of the enemy and robbers along the way. And we came to Jerusalem and rested there for three days. On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed out in the house of the Lord by the hand of Meremoth son of Uriah the priest, and so on. All this is filled with mysteries. For above we read that they began to go up from Babylon on the first day of the first month,[4] and now it is said that they moved on from the River Ahava on the twelfth day of the same month. On the first day of the month, therefore, they went out of the gates of Babylon, but up until the twelfth day they were waiting near the aforesaid river until they might summon the Levites and Nathinnites from the region of Casphia to join them and more diligently **/1400/** entrust themselves to the Lord by fasting and praying on account of the dangers of the long journey, as the occasion demanded. We too, then, when we are teaching peoples new to the Church to renounce the devil and to believe in and confess the true God,[5] it is as though we are going out from Babylon

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:139, 22).

2 Ps. 45:16 (44:17).

3 Prov. 31:23.

4 Cf. Ezra 7:9.

5 On the renunciation of Satan, cf. *In Ezr*. 1.1061–67 and the accompanying note. In addition to renouncing the devil, those undergoing baptism had to confess faith in each person of the Trinity and were immersed three times, once for each confession. These 'baptismal confessions' were a formative part of the ceremony from as early as the third century, and are mentioned in Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition*.

at the beginning of the first month with money to be consecrated to
[323] the Lord: for we are showing them the beginning of a new way of life that leads those who have been freed from the devil to the heavenly kingdom. This is why in Sacred Scripture this same month is often called the 'month of new things' or the 'month of new crops',[1] for in this very month too their fathers were led out of Egypt by Moses to signify this same meaning of a new way of life. But when to these same hearers of the new life we hand over the creed of the faith,[2] which was composed by the twelve apostles and consists of as many statements,[3] we in a sense stop at the first resting-place for twelve days and only then continue on the journey to the Promised Land which we have begun when we show them that the path of the virtues, whereby we arrive at life, must be entered through accepting knowledge of the faith. On these days Ezra, together with the descendants of the exiles, was devoted to fasting and praying and to gathering the Levites and the Nathinnites, no doubt because it is necessary that when we propose to bring new peoples to the faith, it is then above all that we ourselves should pay particular attention to the pursuit of the virtues, so that thereby we may both entrust ourselves more intimately to the Lord and also set forth an example of good actions to those whom we are

1 Ex. 12:2, 13:3–4, 23:15, 34:18; Deut. 16:1.

2 *symbolum fidei tradimus*. The Latin noun *symbolum* (from Greek *symbolon*, 'token') was the customary word for creed, which was meant to act as a sign of faith in God: see Ferguson 1998b. The 'handing over of the creed' (*traditio symboli*) mentioned here was a part of the baptismal rite, being one of the catechetical instructions required of candidates for baptism: see above *In Ezr*. 1.1377–86 and the accompanying note. In the West, the creed used at baptism was the Apostles' Creed: see Jungmann 1959: 78–96.

3 The story of the compilation of the Apostles' Creed is reported by the fourth-century writer Rufinus, who in telling the story claims to be passing on a view already deemed traditional by the time he was writing. Rufinus reports that after Christ's ascension, the apostles were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak different languages so they could preach to all nations (see Acts 2:1–21). Before separating, they drew up a common summary of their faith '…so that they might not find themselves, widely dispersed as they might be, delivering divergent messages to the people they were persuading to believe in Christ', *Commentarius in Symbolum apostolorum* (PL 21:335; trans. Kelly 29). Each one of the twelve apostles therefore contributed a clause, out of which the creed was constructed. The story, though rejected as fantastical by modern scholars, testifies to an important medieval view which Bede readily accepted, namely that the 'rule of faith' professed by the Church was traceable to the apostles: see Kelly 1950: 1–13.

instructing. Let us also call forth a devout company of brothers to support us, so that with their help we may more effectively transfer the souls of the faithful to the community of the elect and to the citadel of a more perfect life, as though we were transferring holy vessels to the Lord's temple.

Appropriately, it is also **/1425/** added that when those who came up from Babylon arrived at Jerusalem, they remained there for a period of three days and only then offered and weighed out in the Lord's house the silver and the gold and the vessels which they had brought. For the three days of tarrying in Jerusalem are the excellent virtues of faith, hope and love that all the faithful should possess.[1] Teachers, therefore, must first of all manifest these in themselves, and only then offer those whom they have taught and educated in these same virtues to the Fathers who have preceded them in Christ for their approval. For when the Holy Church finds that those whom we are catechizing are sound in faith and action, it is as if, upon weighing the vessels that we offer in the temple through the hand of the priests, she discovers them to be both of pure metal and of perfect weight. This is not only done in this Church by the elect every day in examining the life of believers, but, as we said above,[2] is also completed more perfectly in the heavenly Jerusalem in those who have deserved to enter it. For in this life holy teachers, as though after remaining for three days in Jerusalem, on the fourth day present to the priests for weighing out the silver and the gold which they brought as an offering when they reveal that they themselves are strong in faith, sublime in hope, and fervent in love, and secondly show that their hearers shine forth like tested silver through the confession of true faith, that they gleam in the manner of the best gold through the purity of inviolate understanding, and that they stand out as though they were vessels consecrated to God through the reception of spiritual gifts in themselves. In the heavenly homeland too, these same teachers, when they receive a reward first of all for their own faith, hope and love and then for those whom they have taught, it is as though after the joy **/1450/** of a three-day stay in Jerusalem they are honoured more handsomely for the gifts and precious vessels worthy of God they have brought. *[324]*

But there is a difference between these vessels which Ezra and his priests offer in Jerusalem and those which Zerubbabel and Jeshua are

1 Cf. 1 Cor. 13:13.
2 Cf. *In Ezr.* 2.1340–54.

reported to have presented above.[1] For those were carried off from the Lord's temple to Babylon and later were returned to Jerusalem, whereas these were made in Babylonia but through an act of devotion were sent to Jerusalem by the king or princes of the Persians or even by the people of Israel who were dwelling in these regions. The first vessels, therefore, stand for those who, after the knowledge and sacraments of the faith have been received and virtuous works undertaken, are deceived by the ancient enemy and snatched away into the confusion of sins but through the compassion of Christ's grace are called back to salvation, whereas the second stand for those who were born subject to death because of the sin of the first transgression but who are atoned for through the service of priests by the washing of regeneration[2] and gathered together as children of the Holy Church. The earlier vessels suggest those who are repenting for their sins, the later those who are giving thanks[3] for their perseverance in the virtue they have begun. In this connection, it is well added:

[8:34] And the entire weight was recorded at that time. For the priests in the temple record the entire weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels which are offered to the Lord when zealous teachers carefully examine the life of those under them and, in so far as each one has made progress in faith or action, determine by skilful scrutiny how they may assign each of them their proper ranks in God's house according to the measure of their capacity. But nowadays[4] too, if **/1475/** those in authority are lazy and slack and are ignorant of the life of those entrusted to them or pretend to be ignorant, there is an internal judge who in the balance of his judgement keeps a full record of the number of believers and the weight of the soul of each of them, so that he may reward *each according to his work*.[5] One can also say that when

1 Cf. Ezra 1:7–11, 5:14, 6:5.

2 *lavacrum regenerationis*: i.e. the sacrament of baptism. Similar terminology is used at *In Ezr*. 1.45–46.

3 Reading (with MS R) *gratiam agentes* for *gentes*: see Appendix 1. If *gentes* is to be retained, the PL reading is clearly preferable, which has *haec perseverantes virtute coepta gentes insinuant*, '…the latter suggest those peoples (or Gentiles/pagans) who are persevering in the virtue they have begun'. Either way, as the preceding sentences make clear, the contrast Bede is drawing is between believers who have lapsed from the faith and recent converts to Christianity.

4 The reference to the present (*nunc*) once again calls to mind the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*, the central theme of which is the neglectfulness of those in positions of religious authority in Bede's Northumbria.

5 Rom. 2:6.

holy preachers arrive in the heavenly Jerusalem with those whom they have instructed, at that time the entire weight of their good action is recorded in the book of life and is given worthy recompense in heaven.
[8:35] But the descendants of the exiles who had come out of the captivity also offered holocausts to the God of Israel: twelve calves for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs and, as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a holocaust to the Lord. The great devotion and religious feeling of those who had come out of the captivity are shown when, arriving at the Lord's temple and altar, first of all they offered holocausts, not only for themselves but also for all Israel (i.e. both for those who had already returned home and for those who still remained exiled from their homeland), so that in all things the mercy of their Creator might protect them all. The spiritual understanding is also clear, namely that those who by repenting have truly and utterly escaped the captivity of the ancient enemy in which they were held fast because of sin are the ones who submit themselves with determined purpose to the service of God, and who have removed themselves from the lowest passions and burn completely with the flame of heavenly desire for things above. This is what it means to offer sacrifices and victims of a holocaust (i.e. totally burnt up) to the Lord: to think of and do nothing else besides his will in all things. **/1500/** It is also an indication of a mind made perfect when one sacrifices victims for all Israel, i.e. when one supplicates heavenly mercy for the welfare of all the faithful, as if mindful of the unity and brotherhood in them all. *[325]*

[8:36] They delivered the king's edicts to the lords who were from the king's court and to the governors beyond the river, and they raised up the people and the house of God. Another version has **and they made the people and house of God glorious**.[1] They raised up the people,

1 *Alia editio habet, et clarificaverunt populum et domum Dei*. Most Vulgate manuscripts have *elevaverunt*, 'they raised up', though Bede has the comparable form *levaverunt*, which agrees with the Codex Amiatinus. Although later (see *In Ezr*. 2.1759) Bede uses the term *alia editio* to refer to Esdras A, the present reference is clearly not to the latter, which reads *honorificaverunt gentem et templum Domini* (3 Esd. 8:68). Moreover, the Old Latin of the Vercelli manuscript has *et produxerunt populum et domum dei*... (fol. 110v, col. 1). The reading 'made glorious' (*clarificaverunt*) is closest to the Septuagint's *edoxasan*, 'glorified'. Denter 1962: 99 takes *clarificaverunt* as either a textual improvement or 'a hearing error' introduced by a scribe, but its closeness to the Greek may be a sign that Bede has relied on Jerome's hexaplaric translation of Esdras B – if, that is, the text was available to him in the Codex Grandior: see Introduction, pp. xix–xxi.

therefore, when through the royal authority that elevated Ezra, they made the people honourable to all; they also raised up God's house by adorning it more reverently with the vessels and gifts that the king and his counsellors and princes sent to it, and also by rendering its servants and priests free from tributes or taxes except to the Lord alone. Mystically, however, the people and temple of God held one and the same figure of the Holy Church, which Ezra and the descendants of the exiles raise up after bringing the vessels sacred to God from Babylon when holy preachers, after gathering new congregations of believers to it with God's help, reveal the Church to be venerable and awe-inspiring to all, even to those who are outside of it. Likewise, these same preachers, when they carry forward all the way to the reception of celestial rewards those whom either by their examples or their words they have instituted in a good way of life, they also raise up the people and house of God because they assuredly give great joy to the elect, both to those who are dwelling in the heavenly homeland and to those still travelling on earth.

[326] **[9:1–2] After these things were accomplished, the leaders came to me and said, 'The people of Israel /1525/ and the priests and Levites have not kept themselves separate from the people of the lands and from their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, and have mingled the holy seed with the people of the lands. And the hand of the leaders and officials has been the first in this crossing of boundaries.'**[1] The crime of this transgression is also plainly described in the prophet Malachi and is denounced by prophetic authority.[2] For when they had returned from captivity in Babylonia, not only the leaders and priests and Levites but also the remaining people cast aside their wives who were of the Israelite race, who were exhausted and unable to work due to their poverty and the privations of too long a journey and the weakness of their sex, and so their bodies had become weak and unattractive; and they joined in marriage with foreigners either because they were flourishing in age, or were more beautiful because of the care they took of their bodies, or because they were the daughters of powerful and rich men. These Israelites, it

1 'crossing of boundaries' = *in hac transmigratione*. This is the reading of the Codex Amiatinus; most Vulgate MS have *in transgressione hac*, 'in this transgression'.

2 Mal. 2:11–12.

should be understood, were not from among those who had come up with Ezra on that occasion but from those who had long since come up from captivity with Zerubbabel and Jeshua.[1] For those who had come up with Ezra could not have come so rapidly to despise the teaching of such a great guide and leader that, having remained in their homeland for not even five months, they would have abandoned their own wives and accepted foreign ones; rather, those leaders must be understood to have been from the number of those who were anxious to condemn this crime by reporting to Ezra.

Nor should one be surprised how it is the people of Israel along with the priests and Levites who are said to have committed this crime, when the earlier return consisted more of people from Judah and Benjamin than from **/1550/** the ten tribes who were called Israel. 'For it should be known that, when Israel (i.e. the ten tribes) was led into captivity, the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin were without distinction also called by the former name "Israel"'.[2] In this verse, therefore, **the people of Israel** should not be interpreted as referring to the ten tribes (as opposed to Judah and Benjamin), but in a general way as referring to the people of God (as opposed to the people of the surrounding lands), who polluted the dignity of their heavenly name[3] by associating with people of the lands.[4] For the same prophet Malachi, whom the Hebrews declare to be none other than Ezra,[5] also mentions

1 Cf. *In Ezr.* 2.1778–82.

2 Jerome *In Malachiam* 1.1 (CCSL 76A:903.18–20).

3 Cf. Gen. 32:28. After wrestling all night with an angel, the patriarch Jacob had his earthly name changed to the heavenly name 'Israel' (Heb. 'he who strives with God'), thus marking out his people as God's chosen.

4 Bede appears anxious here that his readers do not misunderstand the significance of 'people of Israel' in this context. In 931 BC, the Israelite monarchy was divided in two parts, the northern kingdom containing the ten tribes and being called Israel, the southern containing the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and taking the name Judah. However, with the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, many northern Jews came southward and, before long, all twelve tribes were called by the name Israel as a designation for the 'people of God in general', in contrast to the non-believers of the lands surrounding them: see Wood 1970 and Castel 1985. By contrasting the people with a 'heavenly' name (i.e. the people of God) with those who have an 'earthly' name (i.e. the people of the lands), Bede is making a play on words, since in Latin the word *terra* can mean both 'land' and 'earth'.

5 Though entitled Malachi, the biblical book of this name is anonymous. The title derives from the mention in Mal. 3:1 of 'my messenger' (Heb. *mal'ākî*). Jewish tradition held that the word is merely an epithet for a prophet, and in the Talmud and Targums that prophet was identified as Ezra: see Cohen 1969: 335. Bede probably knew

this transgression in the book of his prophecy as follows: *Judah has sinned, and a detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: for Judah has desecrated the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off the man who has done this, both the teacher and the disciple, from the tents of Jacob, even though he brings a gift to the Lord of Hosts*.[1]
[327] When he says 'Judah' here, he clearly means that the people of the first return had been defiled by this crime. But by adding, *May the Lord cut off the man who has done this, both the teacher and the disciple, from the tents of Jacob*, he showed by the words 'master' and 'disciple' that both the rulers and the people were polluted by this sin and that both, if they will not reform, must be rooted out from the fellowship of the holy. And when he added, *even though he brings gifts to the Lord of Hosts*, he warns that those who do not shrink from submitting themselves to the devil by sinning offer victims to the Lord in vain.

In this episode we should admire the faith and excellent resolution of the people who were freed from captivity, who **/1575/** refer to themselves as **the holy seed** but the other nations in distinction to their own as **the people of the lands**, so that they might openly imply that they themselves, although born from the earth,[2] nevertheless have their dwelling not on earth but in heaven[3] insofar as they, more than other nations, believed in the God of heaven and hoped to obtain heavenly blessings from him. Thus they rightly grieve that their holiness had been polluted by the detestable actions of the Gentiles and, what is worse, they acknowledge that even the leaders by whom they ought to have been corrected were the first to have gone astray. And it should be carefully noted and used as an example of good works that while some leaders sinned and caused the common people who were entrusted to them to sin, other leaders who were of more wholesome view for their part do their best to correct those sins; but because they cannot do this themselves they refer the matter to their *pontifex* (i.e.

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of this tradition of identifying Malachi with the prophet Ezra from Jerome's commentary on this book, e.g. *In Malachiam* Prol. (CCSL 76A:901.15–17): 'The Hebrews surmise that Malachi is the priest Ezra, because all that is contained in his book is mentioned by this prophet…' Cf. *In Malachiam* (CCSL 76A:933.230–7).

1 Mal. 2:11–12.

2 Here again, Bede is playing on the meaning of the Latin *terra*, which denotes both 'land' and 'earth'.

3 Cf. Phil. 3:20.

their archbishop)[1] through whose authority so grave, so manifold, and so long-lasting a sin can be expiated. No one can doubt, in fact, that the foreign wives figuratively stand for the heresies and superstitious sects of philosophers, which, when they are recklessly admitted into the Church, often greatly contaminate the holy seed of catholic truth and pure action with their errors.[2] But so long as Christians are not ashamed to mimic all the sins by which heathens are typically polluted, it is as if they degenerate through foreign wives from the holy seed of God's word in which they were born, as the apostle James says: *Of his own will he has begotten us by the word of truth*.[3] And so long as they follow the allurements of erring men and **/1600/** display the sinful behaviour they have learnt from these for all to see, they are like ones who create profane offspring from the daughters of foreigners.

[9:3] When I heard this speech, I tore my cloak and tunic, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down in sorrow. Through the sombre garb of a mourner Ezra reveals the inmost anguish of his heart. He tears his clothing, pulls out hair from his head and beard, and sits down in sorrow in order that by such defilement of his body and clothing along with the sadness of his face, he may more swiftly rouse *[328]* the minds of all to repentance of their own or their brethren's sin. But since by clothing it is usually our works that are designated, by which we are clothed for glory if they prove to be clean, or for death if they prove to be dirty and not resplendent with nuptial love,[4] just so the hairs of the head represent our thoughts,[5] which arise from the hidden

1 *pontificem, id est archiepiscopum*. On this telling equation of pontifical with archiepiscopal authority, see above *In Ezr*. 2.890 and the accompanying note, as well as Introduction, pp. xxxiii–xxxvi and DeGregorio 2004: 18–20. Cf. also *In Ezr*. 3.1108, where Ezra is referred to as *antistes*, another term for a bishop.

2 On Bede's attitude to the secular philosophical tradition, cf. *In Ezr*. 1.969–75.

3 Jam. 1:18.

4 *nuptiali splendida caritate*. The reference is to the parable of the wedding banquet in Matt. 22:1–14, at which the guest who fails to dress in clothes suitable for a wedding (*nuptialem vestem*) is bound hand and foot and cast into the darkness outside. Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory wrote that the wedding clothes in this parable symbolize love: see Ambrose *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 7.204 (CCSL 14:285.2258–62); Augustine *Contra Donatistas* 20.27 (CSEL 53:126.18–28); and Gregory *Homiliae in evangelia* 2.38.9 (CCSL 141:368.212–23). Moreover, Bede himself used the phrase *nuptialem caritatis vestem*: see *Epist. Cath*. (203.44); *In prou. Sal*. 3.31 (156. 323); and *Hom*. 1.14 (104.305).

5 Gregory *Moralia in Job* 2.52.82 (CCSL 143:109.2–3) and *Regula pastoralis* 2.7 (PL 76:42A); cf. Bede *In Cant*. 2 (244.25–29) and 5 (325.338–40).

root of our heart (as though from the internal folds of our brain), and which should be preserved if they are righteous but cut off if they are wicked. This is why Samuel's mother said about her son who would become holy: *And no razor shall come upon his head*;[1] and the Lord said to the apostles: *And not a hair of your head will perish*,[2] no doubt because all the thoughts of the saints are worthy of eternal remembrance in the eyes of the Lord.[3] But for a sinner to be cleansed from his own iniquities, it is necessary that he cast out from himself depraved thoughts, which are the source and tinder of evil actions. Hence in Leviticus when a leper had regained health, among other rituals of cleansing he was also ordered to shave off even all his own body hair so that, having thus made atonement, he might deserve to enter the camp with his offerings,[4] because we are completely cleansed from the filth of the vices only when we take pains to expel from ourselves not only actions but also thoughts that are harmful. **/1625/** A beard too, which is a sign of male sex and maturity, is customarily taken to mean virtue.[5] The *pontifex*[6] tore his cloak and tunic to signify that the actions of the people over whom he was ruling were less than perfect and needed to be torn into pieces through penance and restored to a better condition. He pulled out the hairs of his head to suggest to these same people that worthless thoughts should be abolished from their own heart and a place created for the rebirth of useful ones; he pulled out hair from his beard too so that it might be made clear that they should be humbled even with regard to those very virtues which they seemed to possess and might remember that a virtue which was obviously mixed with sins counted for little or nothing in the examination of the internal judge; he sat down in sorrow to teach that pardon for so great an offence should be earned through the lamentation of repentance. Nor should we marvel if such great undertakings of the good leader instantly bore great fruit of virtue in his subjects. For consider what follows:

[9:4] And all who feared the word of God concerning this transgression of those who had come up from captivity gathered round me. And

1 1 Sam. 1:11.
2 Luke 21:18.
3 Ps. 112:6 (111:7).
4 Cf. Lev. 14:8.
5 Cf. Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 33.2.4 (CCSL 38:284.20–21).
6 See above *In Ezr*. 2.890 and the accompanying note.

I sat in sorrow until the evening sacrifice. Oh how much their attitude had changed! Above it was said that many followed the wickedness of their leaders and teachers into licentiousness, but now, once the good leader had turned to lamentation and indicated through his own grief and tears what ought to done by those who commit sin, all who feared God's word, which threatens that sinners are to be punished, are said *[329]* to have gathered around him. Oh how much devout examples aid good teachers! Ezra said nothing at all, but, having merely heard of **/1650/** the crime, it is written that he turned to tears and weeping and drew a multitude of the faithful around him not by shouting but by lamenting. It is added:

[9:5–6] And at the evening sacrifice I rose up from my self-abasement and, having torn my cloak and tunic, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God and said: 'Oh my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to you, my God'. Ezra had prepared himself both through compunction of heart and through bodily affliction so that he might be made worthy to hear heavenly mercy, and only then did he begin to break forth in words of prayer. He bends his knees, spreads out his hands, and pours forth prayers to the Lord at the time of the evening sacrifice, not doubting that this sacrifice which is offered with a humble spirit and contrite heart[1] would be more pleasing to God than one offered with the flesh or blood of cattle. Typologically, however, in the fact that with his garment torn he falls on his knees, spreads out his hands to God and turns the minds of very many to repentance by pouring out prayers and tears, as is written in what follows,[2] he represents the Lord Saviour, who deigned to pray for our sins both before and at the very time of his passion, and who allowed his hands to be stretched out on the cross and the garment of his own flesh to be torn with wounds and mortified at the appointed time on behalf of our restoration, so that, as the Apostle says: he who *died on behalf of our sins* might rise *for our justification*.[3] This was aptly done at the time of evening sacrifice either because the Lord at the end of the age[4] offered the sacrifice of his own flesh and blood to the Father

1 Cf. Dan. 3:39.

2 Cf. Ezra 10:1.

3 Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3.

4 *in fine saeculi.* In Bede's reckoning, Christ's incarnation and passion come at the end of the fifth of the so-called 'Six World Ages': cf. above *In Ezr.* 1.1220–27, and *DTR* 66 (464.36–40).

and **/1675/** ordered that it should be offered by us in bread and wine; or because with legal sacrifice coming to an end, he freed us through his own passion and, separating us from the people of the lands, made us become heavenly and allowed those who are chaste in heart and body to adhere to him. This prayer too, in which, though he was righteous, he associated himself with the people who were sinners, saying **[9:6–7] My God, I am too ashamed and blush to lift up my face to you, My God, because our iniquities are multiplied over our heads and our sins have grown to the heavens from the days of our forefathers,** and so on until the end of the prayer where it says, **Here we are before you in our sin; no one can stand in your presence because of this**,[1] is appropriate to the humility of our Redeemer, who appeared in the likeness
[330] of sinful flesh to take away the sins of the world.[2] Hence in the Psalms also (which, as the Gospel attests,[3] were written in his own person) he clearly refers to our sins, which he had taken upon himself, as his own, saying, *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me far from my salvation?* and adding why he says, *the words of my sins*,[4] and again, *Oh God, you know my foolishness, and my sins are not hidden from you*,[5] not because he himself could have sins or foolishness in him, who, as the Apostle says, *has become for us wisdom from God and righteousness and holiness and redemption*,[6] but because taking upon himself the cause of those whom he had come to save, he compassionately deigned to transfer to himself even those things that in reality were proper to their weakness.

[10:1] While therefore Ezra was thus praying and lamenting and weeping and lying down before the temple of God, a very large assembly /1700/ of Israel, of men, women, and children, gathered around him, and the people wept with much weeping. How much Ezra's prayer, tears, and sorrow accomplished is shown when it relates that a very great crowd of weeping people of both sexes and of all ages immediately gathered around him. They were weeping either because those who had sinned were doing penance for their sin, or because those who had remained pure were sorrowing over the transgression

1 Ezra 9:15.
2 Rom. 8:3; John 1:29.
3 Luke 24:44.
4 Ps. 22:1 (21:2).
5 Ps. 69:5 (68:6).
6 1 Cor. 1:30.

and downfall of their brothers. But whether it was the former or the latter or both groups who were weeping, all are shown to have been greatly troubled by the prayers and laments of their *pontifex*,[1] since even the women and children are said to have been present here as well. The event can also be understood to have happened in this way, namely that first those who were innocent and righteous flocked to Ezra when he says, **And all who feared the word of God concerning this transgression of those who had come up from captivity gathered round me**,[2] but now those who had sinned also came to do penance, together with their wives and children.

[10:2] And Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam answered and said to Ezra, 'We have sinned against our God and have married foreign wives from the peoples of the land'. Josephus says that this Shecaniah was the first of the citizens of Jerusalem who himself, as was proper for a leader, immediately used his great authority to support Ezra's plan, both by acknowledging that the people had sinned as he himself had done and by urging that it was necessary for them to do penance after casting out their foreign wives along with the children who were born of them.[3]

[10:2–3] 'And now,' he says, **'if there is repentance in Israel for this, /1725/ let us make a covenant with our God and send away all these wives and those who are born from them.** If the people, he says, fully *[331]* repent for this transgression, first, having turned to the Lord, let us promise amendment and ask for mercy; and then, having returned to ourselves, let us remove from us the whole root and stem of the wicked deed we have committed – namely, by casting out the unlawful wives along with their progeny. For this is what it means for one truly to do penance: to be entirely turned to God inwardly in the heart, and outwardly to cut off all the means of committing sin from its very source. And by adding,

[10:4] 'Rise up, it is your part to make a decision, and we will be with you, so take courage and do it', he very fittingly teaches how one should consult with superiors, namely that a person should say what he has understood is best according to his own reason, if he believes that he has understood well, and yet leave the prerogative of decision-making to the person who is qualified to make it and be ready to submit

1 See above *In Ezr*. 2.890 and the accompanying note.
2 Ezra 9:4.
3 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.5.4.

to all that this person ordains should be done in accordance with the will and law of God.[1]

[10:6] And Ezra rose up from before the house of God and went away to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, and entered there. Eliashib was the high priest at that time. For after Jeshua son of Josedech, his son Joachim occupied the office of high priest, and Joachim's son Eliashib served after him, as both the following part of this sacred narrative and Josephus's *History of the Jews* attest.[2]

[10:6] He ate no bread and drank no water, for he continued to mourn over the transgression of those who had come from captivity. Here **/1750/** we have[3] an exceptional example not only of weeping and praying but also of fasting on behalf of those who have sinned. And although those who mourn and weep over their own sins are blessed because they are comforted by the forgiveness they receive,[4] how much more blessed should we believe are those who weep even for the errors of their brethren, so much so that they do not even wish to touch bread and water (which is the refreshment of the abstinent), or to enter their own house, or lie down on their own bed[5] but rather rejoice to spend the night praying in the courts of the Lord's house.[6] For in that place there was a priest's house which Ezra is said to have entered when evening came. In fact, for 'the chamber of Jehohanan' another edition[7] has 'the *pastoforium* of Jehohanan', a name that Scripture frequently applies to those porticos that surrounded the temple on all its sides and in which the ministers and stewards of this same temple were accustomed to dwell.[8] Moreover, even today people mourn over

1 This passage, monastic in tone, echoes St Benedict's remarks on the abbot's summoning the brethren for counsel: see *Regula Benedicti* 3.1–6 (ed. Fry 178–80); and DeGregorio 2005: 351–54.

2 See Neh. 12:10; and Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.5.5.

3 Reading *habemus* for *habebunt*: see Appendix 1.

4 Cf. Matt. 5:5.

5 Cf. Ps. 132:3 (131:3).

6 Cf. Ps. 134:1 (133:1).

7 *alia editio*. The reference is to Esdras 3 (the Septuagint's Esdras A) 9:1: 'Upon leaving the court of the temple Ezra went to the priest-chamber (*pastoforium*) of Jehohanan son of Eliashib'. Cf. Denter 1962: 99–100. Bede would have had access to the text of Esdras A in the Codex Grandior: see Introduction, pp. xix–xxi.

8 Bede's claim that the term *pastoforium* (or *pastophorium*) is employed 'frequently' in Scripture in connection with *porticus* is puzzling: the word occurs elsewhere in Scripture only at 1 Esdras 8:60 and 1 Macc. 4:38 and 4:57, and none of these say anything about *porticus* or side-chambers.

the transgression of those who have come from captivity when they lament that those who have recently been freed from sins by doing penance have fallen into them once more by doing wrong, so that they can be captured again by the devil. The Apostle Peter speaks of their seducers as though of the parents of unclean wives: *For by speaking proud words of foolishness they seduce into the self-indulgent desires of the flesh those who have only just escaped from them*,[1] and a little further on concerning those who, coming up as it were from captivity, are nevertheless enslaved by self-indulgence, he says: *For if they escape the corruptions of the world through knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are entangled again and overcome by them, and are worse off at the end than they were previously*.[2] *[332]*

[10:7–9] /1775/ And a proclamation was issued in Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem, and so on until it says: **Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem within the three days.**[3] Since it is the descendants of Judah and Benjamin who are said to have assembled, it is very clear that those who were defiled by marrying foreign wives were from the first group of returnees, who came from those tribes and were recalled home by Jeshua and Zerubbabel, as we have said above.[4]

[10:9] This was in the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month, and all the people sat down in the courtyard of the house of God, trembling because of their sin and the rain. The ninth month is the one which is called 'Casleu' (Chislev) by the Hebrews and 'December' by the Romans. Who does not know that this month comes in the middle of winter and is rainy and surprisingly stormy? Hence we should note all the more carefully that when the people assembled in the middle of winter, it is recorded that they trembled **because of their sin and the rain**. For when they noticed that the rains were pouring down more than was usual even for this wet season, they were brought back to their conscience and understood that this had happened because of their sins and that heavenly wrath was imminent. Admonished by this disturbance of the sky, they grew frightened, and for this reason they had not dared to carry on their business in their own homes but sat down in the courtyard of the Lord's house and put on penitential and

1 2 Pet. 2:18.
2 2 Pet. 2:20.
3 Ezra 10:9.
4 Cf. *In Ezr.* 2.1539–43.

humble garb. This was done as a lesson for those who, even when the elements are stirred up and weather deteriorates into violent winds, floods of rain, heavy snowstorms, parching drought or even the death of men and animals, and when the judge himself threatens **/1800/** the force of his anger through open signs, do not at all seek to correct their behaviour so as to placate that judge and escape the destruction hanging over them, but instead merely busy themselves to find some means to avoid or overcome the adverse conditions raging outside on
[333] account of their sins. Now **the people sat in the courtyard before the house of God** – that is, around the court of the priests, which surrounded the Lord's house on all its sides, as we have taught above.[1] It had on all its sides in the shape of a square very spacious courtyard buildings in which the people also, if there was need because of rain, could stand and still see what was happening within the temple doors or around the temple. For at ground level the inner walls were built in the form of a colonnade, while the outer walls were solid.[2]

[10:10–11] And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, 'You have transgressed and married foreign wives, to add to the sin of Israel. And now make a confession to the Lord the God of your fathers', and so on until it says: **So the descendants of the exiles did as was proposed. And Ezra the priest and the men who were the heads of the families departed to the house of their fathers,**[3] **and all of them by their names.**[4] This passage answers the one which is stated above: **And Ezra rose up from before the house of God and went away to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, and entered there. He ate no bread and drank no water, for he continued to mourn.**[5] Here is it worth noting the devotion of the *pontifex*[6] who while mourning, fasting, and praying for the people's transgression remained for three days in the temple courts and did not want to enter his own house before **/1825/** he saw that the people agreed to repent with a whole heart and turn to the Lord. The remaining leaders are seen to have shared this devotion as well, since they too are said to have departed **to the house of their**

1 See *In Ezr*. 2.1760–63.

2 Cf. *De templ*. 2 (192.36–193.38).

3 *in domo patrum suorum*: this reading is preserved in the Codex Amiatinus; most Vulgate manuscripts have *in domum patrum suorum*.

4 Ezra 10:16.

5 Ezra 10:6.

6 See above *In Ezr*. 2.890 and the accompanying note.

fathers when the assembly ended. For if the writer of sacred history did not want to indicate this by this sentence, what need was there to write that when the conversation ended Ezra and the heads of the families departed **to the house of their fathers** when they left the precincts of the temple, since anyone would know that they would do this even if Scripture did not say so? And what need was there to add **and all of them by their names,** since this too would have been very well known to everyone, unless it was because he wished it to be understood that these were the sort of men whose names and deeds are deservedly held in remembrance and passed on to be known by posterity?

[10:16–17] And they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter, and they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign wives by the first day of the first month. Observe that the number three is very often used in mystical figures. It was said above[1] that in three days all the descendants of the exiles should come to Jerusalem, and now it is said that in three months (namely the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth months)[2] they are purified from the foreign *[334]* wives. For there are three virtues without which we cannot arrive at life – faith, hope, and love;[3] and coming into the world in the third era, the Lord brought us the grace of the Gospel. For the first era came with the patriarchs before the Law, the second with the prophets under the Law; in the third, he himself came with grace because, redeeming us through his passion, he arose from the dead on the third day.[4] **/1850/** Because through his grace we are both joined in the fellowship of the Holy Church and are cleansed from the crime of our sins, it is fitting

1 Cf. Ezra 10:8.

2 The first of the tenth month to the first month of the following year really equals a period of four months (Tebeth, Shebat, Adar, Nisan). Yet Bede counts only three – Tebeth, Shebat, and Adar, ignoring Nisan – since it suits his argument to discover the number 'three' in this passage.

3 Cf. 1 Cor. 13:13.

4 Cf. Bede *In Sam.* 2 (83.634–38) and *DTR* 64 (456.27–30). The division of the Christian life into four eras (*tempora*) – before the law, under the law, under grace, in peace – derives from Augustine and appears in many of his works: see esp. *De diversis quaestionibus* 66 (CCSL 44A:154.88–155.105), and *Enchiridion* 31 (CCSL 46:112.23–113.54); also Isidore *Etymologiae* 6.17.16. Note that Bede does not mention the fourth age, *in pace*. His exegesis in this passage is thus closer to Gregory *Homiliae in evangelia* 2.31.3 (CCSL 141:270.29–271.41) which, in similarly discussing the allegorical significance of the number three, applies the three-fold schema that Bede uses here. Cf. *In Ezr.* 1.1204–27, where Bede explains the analogous doctrine of the Six World

that the descendants of the exiles not only met in Jerusalem for three days to be corrected from their errors but also completed the task of being purified in three months. But according to the literal meaning, it was appropriate enough and beneficial that the heads of the families and the Levites should take pains to ensure that all who had been stained by profane marriage were dealt with (i.e. were cleansed from such wickedness) before the beginning of the first month so that they might be pure when they entered that very first month in which Passover was to be held, pure when they carried out the Paschal celebration, and pure when they ended the year which they began pure. It is appropriate that we too do the same every year on the first Sunday of Lent, so that as the celebration of the Lord's resurrection approaches *we may cleanse ourselves from all iniquity of the flesh and spirit*[1] so that we ourselves too might be able to share in his resurrection.

[10:18] And among the descendants of the priests who had married foreign wives there were found: of the sons of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers, Maaseiah and Eliezer and Jarib and Gedaliah. The Hebrews relate to this passage the words of the prophet Zechariah: *And the Lord showed me Jeshua (Jesus) the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan was standing at his right side to accuse him;*[2]and a little further on: *And Jeshua was dressed in filthy clothes, and he stood before the angel; and the angel responded and said to those who were standing before him, saying, 'Take away his filthy clothes'. And he said to him, 'See, I have taken away your sin, and have put new garments on you'. Then he said, 'Put a clean cidaris on* **/1875/** *his head'*.[3] It is appropriate that they say, *Satan was standing at his right side* and on his left *to accuse him*, for the accusation was true because he too had taken a foreign wife as had the others. Now the words *Jeshua was dressed in filthy clothes* can be interpreted in three ways: they were filthy either because of illicit marriage, or because of the sins of the people, or because of the impurity of the captivity. The angel before whom Jeshua was standing commanded the rest of the angels on the Lord's behalf to take away his filthy clothes about which we have
[335] spoken, and when they had fulfilled this command by doing so, the same angel speaks to Jeshua again, saying: *See, I have taken away your*

1 2 Cor. 7:1.
2 Zech. 3:1.
3 Zech. 3:3–5.

sin, that is to say, his filthy garments, *and I have put new garments on you*, which means 'I have joined you to an Israelite wife'. And concerning what follows, *Put a clean cidaris on his head*, 'many people call this a "mitre", intending by it that the dignity of the priesthood be understood, because once the filth of his sins has been washed away, he must keep the priesthood pure'.[1]

But one should observe that Ezra does not write that Jeshua himself had married a foreign woman but says that some of his sons and brothers had been defiled by this sin, although the fault of sons reflects upon the father and he cannot be completely righteous who has neglected to correct wrongdoers when given the opportunity. Thus some say that the aforesaid prophecy about Jeshua should be related not to the son of Jozadak but to the Lord Saviour, *who although he is the radiance of the glory and the figure of the substance* of God,[2] took on filthy clothes as the occasion demanded through compassion for our weakness, as Isaiah says: *But he was wounded for our iniquities and was weakened for* **/1900/** *our sins*.[3] *Satan was standing at his right side to accuse him*,[4] seeking always to go against his right side and the virtues, as the sacred history of the Gospel relates; and the Apostle says: he is *in all things just as we are, except without sin*.[5] His filthy clothes are removed and he puts on fresh ones when he has washed *us from our sins with his own blood*,[6] in order that what the Apostle says should happen: *For all of you who were baptized in Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ*.[7] Or he had filthy clothes in his passion and received new garments in his resurrection so that we can truly say about him that *although we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we now do so no longer*.[8] He received a *cidaris* on his head as well because he has been found worthy to hold the eternal priesthood, in keeping with the psalmist's saying: *You are a priest forever*.[9] But the fact that Ezra says the brothers of Jeshua son of Jozadak also had married foreign wives properly applies, however, not to his brothers in the flesh

1 Jerome *In Zachariam* 1.3 (CCSL 76A:771.54); cf. Isidore *Etymologiae* 19.30.6.
2 Heb. 1:3.
3 Is. 53:5.
4 Zech. 3:1.
5 Heb. 4:15.
6 Rev. 1:5.
7 Gal. 3:27.
8 2 Cor. 5:16.
9 Ps. 110:4 (109:4).

but to his kindred after the customary manner of Holy Scripture. For his actual brothers were no longer living or able to devote themselves to pleasure, since one hundred or more years had passed from the time when Cyrus began to rule and sent back Zerubbabel and Jeshua with the migration from Judah and Babylon to rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. It goes on:

[10:19] And they gave their hands [in pledge] to put away their wives, and to offer a ram from the flock for their sin, and so on until the list of penitents ends and it says: **All these had married foreign wives, and**
[336] **there were among them women who had borne children**.[1] First they put away the unlawful wives and only then **/1925/** do they offer a ram on their own behalf so that, cleansed from the crime, they might approach the altar in a state of purity. For it is difficult for a person's offering to be acceptable to God if he does not first strive to abandon the misdeed for which he offers it, as Isaiah says: *Cease to act perversely, learn to do well*.[2] And because they, who were the first to sin, were the descendants or brothers of the high priest, it is right that they offer a ram from their flock as punishment for their crime in order that by such a victim they might indicate that they themselves who were seen to be the teachers and rulers of the people, as it were the leaders of a flock of followers, had arranged to sacrifice themselves with respect to their former way of life and, purged by appropriate penance, to offer themselves to God through a better way of life.

Meanwhile, it should be noted with what great art of warfare the devil constantly assails the faithful and how he never leaves them any time secure from battle. For consider how those who could not be overcome by misfortunes were overcome by enticements; they conquered their public enemies when the Lord's temple was built and dedicated but were conquered by a desire for Gentile women, so that they did not keep the temples of their own hearts and bodies worthy for God to inhabit. Very clearly there is a complete allegorical interpretation of this for our own times. For we see that the minds of the faithful are tempted inwardly with much greater danger now when they are seduced and enticed by their own lust[3] than they were previously tempted outwardly when their brutal opponent was raging

1 Ezra 10:44.
2 Is. 1:16–17.
3 Cf. Jam. 1:14.

against their constancy by sword and fire. But the mercy of the Lord will be present, so that just as it then endowed those people with the virtue of patience against the open battles of those who raged against them, in the same way it may also give us the protection of caution against the snares of enticements that catch us unawares. Accordingly, when **/1950/** the *pontifex*[1] and all those who feared the Lord acted zealously, those who had sinned *were pricked in the heart*,[2] and they cast out their foreign wives. Once they expelled the baseness of self-indulgence, the beauty of chasteness returned; once they cast out the debris of the vices, the flowers and spices of the virtues were strewn in the Lord's city. The words of Ezra, in which he described first the deeds of Zerubbabel and Jeshua and then his own deeds, end here.

Now Ezra himself was clearly a type of the Lord Saviour too, inasmuch as he restored sacred Scripture, recalled the people out from captivity to Jerusalem, enriched the Lord's house with greater gifts, appointed leaders and guardians beyond the River Euphrates who were familiar with God's Law, and purified the descendants of the exiles from their foreign wives. For the Lord restored Sacred Scripture, because when the scribes and Pharisees either had defiled it by their traditions or taught that it should be understood according to the letter alone, he showed it was full of spiritual meaning, according *[337]* as to whether it was written by Moses or by the prophets; and by sending the Holy Spirit upon them he also caused the New Testament to be written down by apostles and apostolic men. He led the people out from captivity in Babylonia and brought them now liberated to Jerusalem and the Promised Land, not only because by suffering on that one occasion on the cross he redeemed the world through his own blood, and descending into Hell he rescued all true Israelites (i.e. the elect) he found there and, leading them to the walls of the heavenly city, granted them the joys of inheritance they had once been promised; but also because daily **/1975/** gathering the faithful from the turmoil of this world, he calls them together to the fellowship of the Holy Church and the eternal kingdom. He increased the riches of the temple with gold and silver and precious vessels which either the people of Israel or rulers of the Persians had sent there through him, because by bringing those who believe in him from both peoples (i.e.

1 See above *In Ezr*. 2.890 and the accompanying note.
2 Acts 2:37.

Jews and Gentiles) into the Church, he does not cease to adorn and glorify her always through the splendour of their faith and good works. He appointed leaders and guardians for all the people beyond the river who knew and taught God's Law because in the Holy Church, which not only has been cleansed in the river of sacred baptism but also by the sincerity of its faith has transcended the Babylonian river (that is, the turmoil of this changing world), he placed apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.[1] He purified the descendants of the exiles from their foreign wives because he forbade that those who by professing the faith had renounced the world should be enslaved any more to the enticements of the world. He also cast out the children of these mothers from the assembly of the returned exiles in case by chance when they grew up they might follow the perfidy of their mothers rather than the faith of their fathers, because he taught that even those of our works that seem good to men are spurious[2] if they are mixed with carnal pleasures or originate from the contagion of human favour, and so are not worthy of the fellowship of those who, completely renouncing the world with their whole mind, move on to the things of heaven and who rejoice not to be weakened by temporal enticements but on the contrary to be made stronger through adversities and to be prepared by them for their heavenly rest.

But if anyone wishes to object that it is not written that they cast out the sons of the adulterers but only the women, even though above when Shecaniah suggests **/2000/**, **Let us make a covenant with our God and send away all these wives and those who are born from them**,[3] it is immediately added, **So Ezra rose up and made the leaders of the priests and Levites and all Israel swear to do according to this word, and they swore**,[4] let him understand that if the descendants of the exiles did not throw out the children that the foreign wives had borne
[338] to them, this was because they taught the children to renounce the unfaithfulness of their mothers, and because being consecrated to the Lord through circumcision and the saving offering, they made them sharers of their own faith and purity. Assuredly, it is clear that the mystery of this is easy to understand, namely that the good works that we do with a view to temporal welfare or favour or pleasure should

1 Cf. Eph. 4:11.
2 Reading *reproba esse* for *reprobasse*: see Appendix 1.
3 Ezra 10:3.
4 Ezra 10:5.

either be reckoned among bad works or be separated from base aspiration and done for the sake of heavenly reward alone. For he, for instance, who fasts, prays, and gives alms with the aspiration of being seen and praised by men is no doubt born such a child of good works as he would be if he were born from the unclean mother of a polluting conscience, and can have no part in the assembly of the exiles who came up from Babylon to Jerusalem, doubtless because righteousness – or rather the pretence of righteousness – which has received its own reward in the present, will be deprived of future reward in heaven.[1] But if the author of such work, turning his mind to better things, begins to do for the sake of heavenly reward what he used to do for the sake of a desire for vain praise, he is like one who consecrates to the Lord his progeny that has been brought forth, even though in an unworthy way, and makes him a Jerusalemite citizen, because **/2025/** when he corrects a badly begun work in time, he renders it worthy of perpetual reward in heaven.

1 Bede evidently has in mind Matt. 6:1–18, with its three sections on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting and rebuke of religious ostentation.

BOOK THREE

[339] **[Neh. 1:1–2] The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. And it came to pass in the month of Chesleu [Chislev] in the twentieth year, while I was in the fortress of Susa, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, together with some other men of Judah, and I questioned them about the Jews that had remained and survived from the capture of Jerusalem.** Nehemiah is interpreted in Latin as 'My consoler is the Lord' or as 'the consoler from the Lord'.[1] For when Nehemiah restored Jerusalem's walls and, after delivering them from the disdain of their enemies, raised up the people of God to the observance of the divine law, it is surely clear that by his word and deed and person he not unsuitably designates the mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus,[2] who indicates that he was sent to console the poor in spirit when he said to his disciples as he was about to ascend to heaven: *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete*,[3] i.e. a Consoler, by whom the psalmist showed that God's holy city (namely the Church) would be rebuilt and also that those who mourn would be consoled when he said: *The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. He heals the broken-hearted*,[4] and so on. The figure of Nehemiah also is suitable for holy preachers, through whose teaching heavenly consolation is revealed to us as they promise the hope of mercy and divine propitiation to the penitent after a lapse into sin, as though they were restoring the fortifications and walls of Jerusalem after they have been demolished by the enemies. Now this month of Chesleu is the one we call December; among the Hebrews it is the ninth month,

1 Jerome *Epistula* 53 (CSEL 54:461.19–20). The Hebrew name *nᵉhemyāh* is composed of two elements, *nhm* 'comfort' + *yh*, a shorted form of Yahweh: see Brown-Driver-Briggs 1996: 637. It is not clear, however, why Jerome took the name to mean *consolator a domino* rather than *consolatio a domino*, which is closer to the Hebrew meaning.

2 Cf. 1 Tim. 2:5.

3 John 14:16.

4 Ps. 147:2–3 (146:2–3).

among us the last month of the year.[1] The name of this month, which in Latin is interpreted as 'his hope',[2] **/25/** is clearly very appropriate to the solemn pledge of one who directed his mind to erecting the ruins of the holy city. For the principal foundation of good action is that we have confident hope in the Lord's help to fulfil what we desire. This is the very month in which our Lord was born in the flesh, most beautifully prefiguring to us long before by its own name that in this month the true Nehemiah (i.e. the consoler from God the Father), long hoped for by the elect, was to come into the world to build up the Holy Church.

Nehemiah writes that he was in the fortress of Susa when the men came who brought the news about Jerusalem. Susa is the capital city of the kingdom of the Persians, as we read in the Book of Esther.[3] Not only Nehemiah but also the prophet Daniel calls it a 'fortress', 'not because the city itself is a fortress, for as we have stated it is a capital city and a very powerful one, but because it is so solidly built that it looks like a fortress'.[4] Now Susa means 'riding' or 'returning'.[5] The *[340]* name aptly befits the defences of the mind of the faithful, especially of those who are charged with the capture of Jerusalem, that is, for the salvation of those who are occasionally snatched away from the Church through the devil's attacks but by repenting are brought back to the Church again by the grace of God. For such people are in a returning fortress – that is, in the strength of a mind called back from the lowest delights to a longing for the heavenly homeland, from which they had fallen in their first parent; such people are in the very strong cavalry of the hearts of the saints who carry God as their rider, according to the prophet's saying: *Mounting your horses, and your riding is salvation*.[6] For the Lord indeed mounts **/50/** his horses when

1 Cf. Bede *DTR* 36 (396.18–20): 'The Hebrews begin both these years [lunar and solar] at the commencement of the Paschal month, but amongst the Romans they have their beginning and end with the lunation that begins with the month of January' (trans. Wallis 103).

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:125.31).

3 Esth. 1:2. The ancient city of Susa (in south-western Iran) was the winter residence of the kings of the Persians: see Myers 1965: 93.

4 Jerome *In Danielem* 2.8.2 (CCSL 75 A:851.770–73). Cf. Dan. 8:2.

5 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:130.20).

6 Hab. 3:8. Bede wrote a commentary on the canticle of Habakkuk: for his comments on this verse, see *In Hab*. (393.350–394.360).

he illuminates the hearts of preachers with the grace of his mercy so that he can rule them; and his riding is salvation because he not only carries to eternal salvation those over whom he presides by ruling them, but also, so that he may likewise preside over them too, through them makes others sharers of this same everlasting salvation as well. Let us therefore see what follows when Nehemiah questioned them about those who had remained after the capture of Jerusalem.

[Neh. 1:3] And they said to me, 'Those who had remained and were left behind at the time of the capture there in the province are in great distress and disgrace; and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire'. The literal meaning is evident, namely that those who had remained after the capture, even though they seemed to be living at peace in view of the fact that the king of the Persians had shown himself to be their friend, and not long previously had sent to them Ezra the scribe with letters in order that he should have authority over all the region beyond the river,[1] nonetheless they were in great distress because their enemies blamed[2] them that the holy city still remained in ruins.[3] But even now in the Holy Church people are rightly afflicted and pricked by a salutary sense of remorse when, even though they themselves have repented of their past wrongdoings, they consider the fact that their neighbours still are subject to sins, so that, through the negligence of those who, having reformed, could have been profitable to many, the devil has free entry into the Church, as through the walls of the ruined city. It is even more lamentable if those very ones who should have been profiting others through their teaching and personal example show to observers an

1 Cf. Ezra 7:25, where authority is conferred upon Ezra to appoint judges and magistrates to judge 'all the people who are beyond the river'.

2 *exprobrarent*. This word does not make sense in the present context. In Ezra 4:7–16, Rehum and others write a letter to Artaxerxes complaining that the Jews are rebuilding Jerusalem; but their grievance was not that the city was still in ruins, but that the Jews were trying to rebuild it. It is possible, therefore, that the word is a corruption of *exprobrare*, in which case the sentence should read, 'because their enemies were blaming them and because the holy city still remained in ruins'. This would make perfect sense: cf. below *In Ezr*. 3.108–10.

3 Despite attempts to rebuild them (see Ezra 4:6–23), Jerusalem's walls, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC, remained in ruins until the 20th year of Artaxerxes (according to Neh. 2:1), i.e. 445, which would be approximately 142 years.

example of destruction in themselves by living corruptly.[1] For this is what is meant by the fact that the gates of Jerusalem **/75/** were burned down by enemy flames: that those who ought, by living and teaching well, to have been introducing worthy people into the assembly of the elect and keeping unworthy people out, perish instead in the fire of avarice, self-indulgence, pride, strife, envy, and the rest of the vices that the evil enemy is wont to bring in. But what seems to happen or *[341]* what action we should take with regard to these sins is shown when it immediately adds:

[Neh. 1:4–6] And when I heard words of this sort, I sat down and wept, and mourned for several days; and I began to fast and pray before the God of heaven, and I said: 'I ask you Oh Lord, God of heaven, strong, great and terrible, who keep your covenant and mercy with those who love you and obey your commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to see the prayer of your servant, and so on until the end of this prayer when it says: **'And guide your servant today, and grant him mercy before this man'.**[2] For if a holy man, hearing that the buildings of stone and wood had been destroyed, rightly mourned, fasted and prayed and did this for a long time while sitting in sadness, how much more ought we to persist with continual laments, tears and prayers over the destruction and ruination of souls which is caused by sin? In this way those who, when the enemy was triumphing, wallowed for a long time in the filth and squalor of sins to the shame of their religion, may, by the Lord's mercy, be elevated once more to their former state of health.

[Neh. 2:1] And it came to pass in the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, and I took the wine and gave it to the king, and I was sad in his presence. Nisan is the first month of the year, **/100/** according to the Hebrews, in which they were wont always to celebrate Passover; this month we call April. Therefore, from what he said above, namely that he mourned, fasted, and prayed for many days, it is unquestionably evident that for four successive months (namely the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth) he

1 This censure of corrupt teachers echoes Bede's *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*, which likewise emphasizes the necessity to teach by example as well as by word: see esp. *Epist. Ecg*. 6–8 (409–11). On the parallels between this commentary and the *Letter*, see the Introduction, pp. xxxi–xxxiii and DeGregorio 2004: 6–20.

2 Neh. 2:11.

gave attention to that most sacred devotion, waiting for an opportune moment in which he could tell his desire to the king. What is more, he was the chief butler;[1] he used to offer the cup to the king and outwardly perform a joyful service, but inwardly was overcome by a grave sadness because he remembered that the holy city had been destroyed and that the people of God were held in disgrace and contempt by the enemies of God. Hence with those like him he bears witness, saying in a psalm: *By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and wept when we remembered you, Oh Zion*.[2]

[Neh. 2:2] And the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad when I see that you are not ill? This is not without reason, but some evil, I know not what, is in your heart.' And I became very much afraid, and so on until the king agrees that Jerusalem be rebuilt and he gives Nehemiah letters for the governors of the region beyond the river and it is said:

[342] **And the king granted my requests according to the gracious hand of my God with me. And I went to the governors of the region beyond the river and gave them the king's letters.**[3] We have plainly learned from the teaching of Isaiah how Cyrus, the first king of the Persians, holds a figure of the Lord Saviour because he ended the captivity of the people of God and decreed that the temple be restored.[4] So too, we can properly take the successor of this same empire, Artaxerxes, who with the same devotion ordered that the city of Jerusalem be rebuilt, **/125/** as a type of the Lord, who builds a city for himself from living stones (that is, the one Church made from all the elect) through the service of preachers. Thus it is appropriate that the name Artaxerxes means 'a light that tests silently'.[5] For the Lord is indeed the light of life who tests the hearts of his faithful silently, at times illuminating them with the sweetness of celestial grace, at others clouding them with the burdens of this life, so that, instructed by temporal

1 *princeps vinarius*. The Vulgate has *pincerna regis*, 'the king's cupbearer' (Neh. 1:11). Bede may be offering *vinarius* as a gloss on *pincerna*, though in his earlier work *The Reckoning of Time*, he uses *pincerna regis* in reference to Nehemiah – *DTR* 9 (306.31). The office of royal cupbearer was one of the oldest and highest positions in the Babylonian court. Every royal residence had a cupbearer, who served both as selector and taster of the king's wine and as guardian of the royal apartment: see Bowman and Gilkey 1954: 670–71; and Williamson 1985: 174.

2 Ps. 137:1 (136:1).

3 Neh. 2:8–9.

4 Cf. Is. 44:28, and above, *In Ezr*. 1.148–214.

5 Cf. Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:129.3).

adversities, they might desire eternal goods more ardently.

This year, in which Jerusalem was allowed to be rebuilt, is a memorable one, and it was prefigured long before in the mystical writings of the prophet Daniel, when the angel said to him that *seventy weeks* were 'shortened' *on his people and on his holy city*,[1] and a little further on: *From the going forth of the word that a response should be given and Jerusalem built until Christ the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks*, and a little further on: *He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week the victim and the sacrifice will cease*.[2] These weeks, therefore, commence from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, when he gave permission for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, at which time, as Julius Africanus writes,[3] 115 years of Persian rule[4] had elapsed and just as many years remained unfulfilled to the time of Alexander the Great, when he killed Darius; but it was the 185th year following the capture of Jerusalem, and they extend up to the time of the Lord's passion, through which an end was imposed on offerings and legal sacrifices. Each week represents seven years, **/150/** making a total of 490 years according to the moon's course, provided that each year contains, in a novel and unusual way, no more than twelve lunar months. For this reason the angel intentionally says that the seventy weeks, which make 475 solar years, were not

1 Dan. 9:24.

2 Dan. 9:25, 27. Bede provides fuller accounts of the so-called 'seventy prophetic weeks' in *DTR* 9 (304.1–310.113 and 66 (486.713–33). These weeks, revealed in a vision to the prophet Daniel (see Dan. 9), are said to refer to the period of years spanning the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah until the birth of Christ, i.e. the so-called Fifth World-Age (cf. *In Ezr.* 1.1220–25, on the Six World-Ages), for which, as Wallis notes (p. 279), they provide the only firm dating framework. Each of these weeks represents a seven-year period, the first seven weeks denoting the 49-year period during which Ezra and Nehemiah worked to rebuild Jerusalem, which is why Bede alludes to these prophetic weeks at this point in the commentary.

3 Julius Africanus *Chronographiai* 5 (PG 10:80B–84B). Actually, Bede's immediate source here is Jerome's *In Danielem* 3.9.24 (CCSL 75A:866.158–889.617), which he follows closely. In discussing the seventy prophetic weeks, Jerome quotes at length 'the opinions of the great teachers of the Church'; the list of authorities cited includes Julius Africanus first – from whom Jerome quotes an extensive passage on the seventy weeks which Bede in turn draws from here – and then Eusebius Pamphili, Hippolytus, Apollinarius of Laodicea, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, and unnamed Hebrew authorities.

4 In *DTR* 9 (307.42), Bede counts 116 years of Persian rule. The actual total is 115 years and 9 months, and the discrepancy may be explained by his rounding that number up in *The Reckoning of Time*, but rounding it down in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*.

[343] 'numbered' but 'shortened' on his people.[1] In *The Reckoning of Time* I have undertaken to discuss the prophet's whole meaning in full, as best I could.[2]

[Neh. 2:10] And Sanaballat the Horonite[3] and Tobiah the Ammonite official[4] heard about this, and they were saddened and greatly distressed that a man had come to seek the prosperity of the children of Israel. Heretics and all enemies of the Church are also saddened whenever they notice the elect labouring for the catholic faith or the correction of morality so that the walls of the Church may be rebuilt. Note how different their mood and situation was now from what it had been earlier, because above it was said that those who had remained from the captivity in Judea were **in great distress and disgrace,**[5] and that Nehemiah also conducted a prolonged fast with weeping and prayers because the walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed and its gates burned down by fire. But now, by contrast, the enemies of this same holy city were saddened and became greatly distressed because

1 Bede's comment on this distinction in *The Reckoning of Time* is helpful: 'But note that he claims that these weeks are not simply "observed" or "calculated" but "diminished"; that is, he covertly impresses upon the reader that he should understand that the years indicated are shorter than usual' – *DTR* 9 (306.23–27), trans. Wallis 306. In short, Bede is arguing that the years referred to here are lunar, the lunar year being 11 days shorter than the solar.

2 See Bede *DTR* 9 (309.102–310.113). This allusion to *The Reckoning of Time* (*c.* 725), one of the few explicit cross-references in Bede's oeuvre, has long been considered our firmest clue for dating *On Ezra and Nehemiah*: the issue is discussed in the Introduction, pp. xli–xlii.

3 Sanballat was one of the local governors under the Persians who opposed Nehemiah's rebuilding efforts. His name, of Babylonian origin, means 'Sin has given life', while the epithet 'Horonite' probably identifies his coming either from the city of Horonaim in Moab or from upper or lower Beth-Horon: see Brockington 1969: 129 and Yamauchi 1988: 687.

4 Tobiah, whose name means 'Yahweh is good' (cf. *In Ezr.* 3.702–03), was the governor of the region of Ammon under the Persians. It is unclear whether he was actually an Ammonite, i.e. one of the peoples forbidden from association with the Jewish community (see Deut. 23:3), or whether the epithet 'Ammonite' was either a derisive nickname or a title associated with his position as governor of Ammon. In any case, like Sanballat, he appears throughout Book 3 as an adversary of Nehemiah: cf. *In Ezr.* 3.696–702, 1955–62. The designation 'official' (Lat. *servus*; Heb. '*ebed*) literally means 'servant' or 'slave', though in biblical texts the term is often used of high officials (e.g. 2 Kings 22:12; Jer. 36:24), and is so translated in the NIV: see Brockington 1969: 129–30 and Yamauchi 1988: 687.

5 Cf. Neh. 1:3.

they realized that its buildings were about to be restored and at the same time that the citizens would be delivered from the insults of their enemies. Hence we should recollect that, even in this life, that saying of the Lord can be fulfilled in which he said, *Amen Amen, I say unto you, that you will weep and mourn but the world will rejoice.* /175/ *You will grieve,* he adds at once, *but your grief will be turned into joy*.[1] For surely, as the world which used to rejoice weeps, the sadness of the just will be turned into joy when it is learnt that the affairs of the Holy Church are prospering and those who by sinning have gone astray are returning to her by doing penance.

[Neh. 2:11–13] And I came to Jerusalem and remained there three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; and I told no one what God had put into my heart to do in Jerusalem; and there was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. And I went out at night by the Valley Gate, and so on until it says: **And I inspected the wall; and I turned back and came to the Valley Gate, and went back in.**[2] He wanders around inspecting the various parts of the devastated city and examines carefully in his mind how each of these should be repaired. Similarly, it is fitting for spiritual teachers also to get up regularly at night and inspect with careful scrutiny the state of the Holy Church while others are resting, so that they might vigilantly investigate how they might repair and rebuild through chastening those things which have been defiled or destroyed in it by the warfare of sins.[3] Jerusalem's wall lies in ruins, and the way of life of the faithful is soiled by earthly and base desires. The gates are consumed by fire when, as a result of their abandoning instruction in the truth, even those who ought to have been opening up the entrance of life to others also by teaching them now grow idle with the same laziness as everyone else and become slaves to temporal concerns. *[344]*

[Neh. 2:17–18] And I said to them, 'You know the distress we are in, because Jerusalem is deserted and its gates have been burned by fire. Come, and let us build the wall of Jerusalem', and so on until **/200/** it says: **And their hands were strengthened for the good work.** These words are plain and exceedingly adaptable to a spiritual meaning because holy teachers – indeed, all who burn with zeal for God – are

1 John 16:20.

2 Neh. 2:15.

3 Since only monks were expected to arise at night to attend the Night Office, the 'spiritual teachers' mentioned here presumably are monastics like Bede himself.

in the greatest distress as long as they discern that Jerusalem (that is, the 'vision of peace'[1] which the Lord has bequeathed and commended to us) lies deserted due to wars of disagreements, and they behold that the gates of the virtues (which, according to Isaiah, 'praise' should occupy)[2] have been destroyed and subjected to insults while the gates of hell prevail. Hence they work hard to unite the ministers of the word in a single purpose so that those buildings of faith and good action which seemed to have been destroyed can rise again.

[Neh. 3:1] Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and they built the Sheep Gate.[3] This Eliashib was the high priest at the time. He was the son of Joiakim, who, after his own father, Jeshua the high priest son of Jozadak, himself bore the insignia of the priesthood for a long time. And it was right that the restoration of the city was begun by a high priest and his brothers, in order that those who were highest in rank might themselves in their good works become an example for all. And it is well that, as the priests are building, it adds:

[Neh. 3:1] And as far as the Tower of One Hundred Cubits they sanctified it, as far as the Tower of Hananel. For priests build to the number of one hundred cubits[4] when they enflame all those whom they are instructing with love and desire for eternal things. For the number one hundred, which in counting on the fingers moves from the left hand to the right,[5] represents celestial rewards, which, in comparison with

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

2 Is. 60:18.

3 The order of gates mentioned by Nehemiah goes round the city in a counter-clockwise direction. However, scholars disagree whether Nehemiah rebuilt the walls round the whole city, or merely round the eastern part (i.e. the Temple Mount and the City of David): for discussion see Simons 1952: 437–58 and Williamson 1984: 81–88. Bede is correct in placing the Sheep Gate on the north side of the Temple Mount, which in those days was at the north-east corner of the city.

4 The exact meaning of the Hebrew *migdal hammē'â* has puzzled modern scholars, some transliterating it literally as 'the Tower of Meah', others interpreting it as the word *mē'â* ('hundred') as an indication of length or distance (i.e. a tower 100 cubits high or 100 cubits away from another location), and still others doubting the very existence of such a tower: for a range of critical opinion, see Avi-Yonah 1954: 241–42; Liid 1992; and Simons 1954: 343, n. 1. Judging from Bede's remarks here and later, he evidently took it to be not a building but an indication of the measurement from the Sheep Gate to the Tower of Hananel: see below *In Ezr*. 3.246–47.

5 Another reference to the finger-counting technique of computus: cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 2.1163–65.

temporal and base rewards, are as the right hand is to the left. They are also said to have sanctified the gate **/225/** which they built. For it is the duty of priests to make their own actions worthy more than others through a special sanctification, and to do this earnestly so that those who are joined with them might sanctify the Lord's name in themselves by living well.

According to the literal sense, however, the reason that the Sheep Gate was the first either to be built or to be consecrated by the priests is that it was in the vicinity of the temple and belonged to them specifically; for this also appears to accord with reason, that the building of the city should begin from the temple, no doubt because it is necessary that before all else we should build up in ourselves constancy of faith and love for God, and then add those works of devotion which *[345]* belong to the love of our neighbour, and thirdly and finally focus on the care of those matters that relate to the general provision for this life, concerning which the Apostle says: *But if we have food and clothing, we are content with these*.[1] But it also seems probable that it was called the 'Sheep Gate' because the sheep which were offered in the temple used to be led through it. Thus, the priests build the Sheep Gate at the commencement of the building of God's city when, before all else, holy preachers imbue their listeners with true faith which works through love,[2] the kind of gate through which they should bring the sacrificial victims of good works and offer these to God on the altar of their hearts; and they sanctify the building of this gate which extended through one hundred cubits **as far as the Tower of Hananel** (i.e. the grace of God)[3] when from the inception of faith they strive towards the firmness of good action (which is not accomplished without God's inspiration and assistance) **/250/** with a singular determination for everlasting reward.

We should note, of course, that where our copies (*nostri codices*) have **and they built the Sheep Gate**, the old translation (*vetus translatio*) has **and they built the gate and pool called Probatica**.[4] John

1 1 Tim. 6:8.

2 Cf. Gal. 5:6.

3 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:125.11).

4 Bede's terminology is revealing: contrasted with *vetus translatio*, *nostri codices* must refer to the Vulgate text of Ezra. The use of the plural (*codices*) suggests that he had more than one manuscript before him: see Introduction, pp. xvii–xxi. Meanwhile, that the phrase *vetus translatio* indicates an Old Latin reading is confirmed by the Vercelli manuscript, which has *et aedificaverunt portam piscinam probaticam* (folio 114v, col. 1).

mentions this name in his gospel when he says: *Now in Jerusalem there is a pool called Probatica, which in Hebrew is called Bethsaida, and which has five porticos. In these a great many sick people used to lie*,[1] and so on. Nor is there any reason why one should not understand that the same place is meant here, for the name προβατική does not differ greatly from the name 'sheep', for in Greek a sheep is called πρόβατον. Jerome too mentions this place in his *Book of Places*, writing as follows: 'The pool of Bethsaida in Jerusalem, which is called προβατική, can be put into our language as "sheep's pool". It formerly had five porticos, and two tanks are there to see. One of these usually fills up with winter rain, while the other, which is amazingly red as though its waters are of blood, bears witness to the signs of the ancient work; for they say that the sacrificial victims were customarily washed in it by the priests, whence it received its name.'[2] From all this it appears that the Sheep Gate is near the Probatica Pool, namely in order that the sacrificial offerings that used to be washed in it could be brought in through it.[3]

[Neh. 3:3] But the Fish Gate the sons of Hassenaah built. He gives the name 'Fish Gate' to the gate which faced Joppa and Diospolis (i.e. Lydda).[4] 'It was nearest to the sea of all of Jerusalem's roads';[5] today it is said to be called the Gate of David and is the first of the gates to
[346] the west of Mount Zion.[6] This view appears to be borne out **/275/** in the Chronicles, in which it is written about Manasseh king of Judah:

1 John 5:2–3. Bede treats these verses allegorically at the opening of *Hom*. 1.23 (161.1–13), associating the five porticos with the five books of the Law which protected the Jewish people.

2 Jerome *De situ locorum* (PL 23:884D–885A).

3 Cf. Bede *Hom*. 1.23 (161.17–162.18): '*Probatica* in Greek means sheep. There were undoubtedly among that people some who knew how to say to the Lord, *We your people and the sheep of your flock confess you forever*. "Probatica", though, is commonly taken as "pool of cattle", called that because the priests used to wash the sacrificial offerings in it'; trans. Martin and Hurst 2:222–23.

4 Cf. Bede *Nom. reg*. (173.171–72): 'Lydda: a city of Palestine located on the shore of the Great Sea, which is now named Diospolis'. Lydda, now Lod, is in fact ten miles from the sea.

5 Jerome *In Sophoniam* 1.10 (CCSL 76A:666.388–9).

6 Cf. Adamnan *De locis sanctis* 1.3 (CCSL 175:185.9–10). The name Zion originally referred to the Jebusite fortress captured by David (2 Sam. 5:6–10), which was subsequently named the City of David (1 Kings 8:1; 2 Chron. 5:2). Later it came to refer to the Temple Mount just to the north of this (Is. 8:18, Jer. 31:6, etc.). Today the name is used for a different part of Jerusalem, outside the walls to the south-west. As Bede makes clear at *In Ezr*. 3.473–78, he uses the name in the first of these designations.

After this he built a wall outside the City of David,[1] *to the west of Gihon in the valley, from the entrance of the Gate of the Fish in a circuit as far as Ophel, and he erected it much higher.*[2]

Typologically, however, just as a flock stands for the Lord's faithful, so in the same way are they frequently called 'fish'. Hence, just as he says to Peter, *Feed my sheep*,[3] so too he promises Peter together with Andrew and the rest of the apostles: *Come, follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men*.[4] In a parable he likewise says about these same fisherman, *They collected the good* fish *in baskets, but threw the bad away*.[5] Therefore, the Fish Gate is built in Jerusalem when those orders are established in the Church through which the elect, separated from the reprobate like good fish from the bad, may be brought into the fellowship of perpetual peace; and the Fish Gate is built when the faithful devote themselves to those works of the virtues by which they may rescue their neighbours, who observe them, from the waves of worldly agitation and desire and introduce them to the tranquillity and peace of the spiritual life.[6]

The prophet Zephaniah also mentions this gate, saying, *the sound of shouting from the Fish Gate, and of wailing from the second*.[7] What he added, *from the second*, 'refers to the gate of a second wall in the same region'.[8] For the Chronicles relate that in Hezekiah's time the wall of the city was double, writing: *Then he worked hard repairing all the broken sections of the wall and building towers on it, and outside it he built another wall*.[9] This concerns the literal sense. But in accor-

1 The 'City of David' was the part of Jerusalem on the ridge to the south of the Temple Mount. The 'Gihon Spring' is in the Kidron valley on the east side of the City of David, just outside the wall; Bede, however, as becomes clear below, mistakenly believed that the Gihon spring was on the west side of the city. *Ophel* ('mound' or 'acropolis') refers to the highest part of the City of David, near the Gihon spring (Neh. 3:26), although Bede thought it was a tower of some kind.

2 2 Chron. 33:14.

3 John 21:17.

4 Matt. 4:19.

5 Matt. 13:48.

6 Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

7 Zeph. 1:10.

8 Jerome *In Sophoniam* 1.10 (CCSL 76A:666.391–92).

9 2 Chron. 32:5. In his earlier work *Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings*, Bede also discusses this verse and glosses the phrase 'from the second' as meaning another gate placed outside of and in addition to the first gate or wall: see *XXX quaest.* 26 (317.1–10).

dance with the principles of allegory, Zephaniah heard *the sound of shouting* **/300/** *from the Fish Gate, and of wailing from the second* because he foresaw that both were to be torn down by the enemies. For he saw that both the faith and the works of teachers, through which it was proper that others should be rescued from the waves of this corruptible life[1] and brought into the Holy Church, would be thrown to the ground by the attacks of the ancient enemy – that is, would be deprived of celestial joys through an appetite for earthly pleasures. For it is appropriate that, from both gates (namely the first and second, the outer and inner), he heard the sound of shouting and wailing, because he saw that both the outer works and the inner hearts of the neglectful were going to be overthrown by the devil's warfare. But since *the Lord lifts up those who are dashed down*,[2] Nehemiah relates that this same Fish Gate, after a long period of ruin, was restored because, even though occasionally some preachers fall through sinning, nevertheless
[347] right up to the end of the world there will be no lack of those who, following in the place of their predecessors, *open the gates of righteousness*[3] through the Lord's aid by preaching to the faithful and living[4] well.[5] It is well added about the builders of this gate:

[Neh. 3:3] They roofed it, and set in place its doors and bolts and bars.

This verse is also repeated frequently concerning the other gates which are said to have been built, doubtless because it is necessary that all who have begun a structure of good action should bring it to the roof of completion by pressing on with what they have begun and install in it fortifications of diligent watchfulness, like doors, bolts and bars. For the reason that doors are placed in the gates is so that at the appropriate time they may be opened and the citizens might have a way of going in and out; the reason that bolts and bars are set in place is so that the doors might be closed **/325/** and barred and the enemy kept from entering. In the same way, therefore, doors of kindly provision should be placed in our good works so that, upon seeing them, our fellow citizens (i.e. our neighbours) *might glorify* our *Father who is in heaven*[6] and by our examples learn also to go forward themselves and

1 'from the waves of this corruptible' = *ab undis vitae corruptibilis*: cf. Bede *Hom.* 2.2 (194.47).

2 Ps. 146:8 (145:7).

3 Ps. 118:19 (117:19).

4 Reading *vivendo* for *iuvendo*: see Appendix 1.

5 Cf. Bede *In Sam.* 4 (222.424–29).

6 Matt. 5:16.

enter the walls of the virtues with us. Bolts and bars must also be set up against the attacks and invasions of enemies, namely so that by diligent industry we can defend ourselves on all sides lest by chance through our carelessness the ancient enemy be allowed to enter and storm the citadel of our virtue. Hence it is well said in Proverbs: *A brother who is helped by a brother is like a strong city; and judgements are like the bars of cities*.[1] For when both peoples (namely Jews and Gentiles) agree among themselves in brotherly love in Christ, each of them builds the one Church, i.e. the city of their Creator. And just as the bars of cities strengthen the gates, in the same way the dogmas of the truth protect the churches throughout the world – which make up the one Catholic Church – from the incursions of infidels.[2] Likewise, we set up the bolts and bars of our gate when we vigilantly take care not to betray the secrets of our faith to pigs or dogs (i.e. to unclean minds), or perform our acts of righteousness for the sake of human favour and allow people to enter and see our good works who bring more danger to us by praising them than they take salutary support from us by seeing them.

[Neh. 3:6] And Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah built the Old Gate. They roofed it, and so on. The Old Gate is the one which John mentions when he says: *Dearest friends,* **/350/** *I am not writing a new command to you but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the word that you have heard*.[3] The Old Gate, therefore, is built in Jerusalem when the word of faith and love, which has been passed on from the beginning of the Holy Church, has begun either to be restored in those who have gone astray or established in those who have recently come to believe. *[348]*

[Neh. 3:8] And they left out Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. The Broad Wall in Jerusalem is the strength and protection of perfect love in the hearts of the elect at which its architects arrive through the process of building when, by advancing in works of charity, they can say to their Creator and Helper: *We ran the way of your commands, for you were broadening our heart*[4] – that broadening, doubtless, of a

1 Prov. 18:19.

2 Most of this and the preceding sentence are taken verbatim from Bede's commentary on Proverbs: see *In prov. Sal.* 2 (98.65–70). For further comment, see Introduction, p. xxiv–xxv.

3 1 John 2:7.

4 Ps. 119:32 (118:32).

mind that has been illuminated, which can love both a friend in God and an enemy for the sake of God.

[Neh. 3:13] And Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah built the Valley Gate. We know that the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which was also called Gehinnom (that is, the Valley of Hinnom), lies toward the eastern side of the city of Jerusalem, through which the brook of Kidron (of which mention is made in the gospel)[1] flows from north to south when it takes in water from snow or rain.[2] But we read that the Valley of Gihon is in the west of this same city, as the book of the Chronicles states concerning King Manasseh of Judah, as was mentioned above: *After this he built a wall outside of the City of David, to the west of Gihon in the valley*.[3] Now Gihon is the name of the spring where Solomon was anointed king outside the city.[4] Therefore, whether in this passage Ezra means this or that or **/375/** another valley of this same city, the mystical meaning is clear, namely that the Valley Gate is built in Jerusalem when either the elect who recently have been imbued with knowledge of the faith, or those who had gone astray but have been restored in the purity of the faith, are ordered by teachers of the truth to observe among other things the virtue of humility[5] so that they may deserve to be raised up by the greater grace of God, for as Sacred Scripture says, *God resists the proud, but bestows his grace on the humble*,[6] and in a psalm: *and the valleys will abound with wheat*,[7] i.e. the humble will abound with the gifts of heavenly refection. And it is well that the Valley Gate is built after the Old Gate and the Broad Wall, no doubt because after the rudiments of catholic faith which are demonstrated through love, we must be taught to observe humility,

1 Cf. John 18:1.

2 Cf. Bede *DLS* 5.2 (261.13–16), which draws from Pseudo-Eucherius *De situ Hierosolimae* 9 (CCSL 175:238.46–9).

3 2 Chron. 33:14; mentioned earlier at *In Ezr*. 3.276–78.

4 Cf. 1 Kings 1:45; also Bede *In Sam*. Nom. loc. (280.274).

5 On the association of the word 'valley' (*vallis*) with humility, see Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 59.2 (CCSL 39:756.65–68), and Ambrose *De fide* 4.12 (CSEL 78:215.74–76). DeGregorio 2005: 348–51 argues that the mention of an ascent through humility at this point in the commentary anticipates and helps to prompt Bede's reference to the seventh chapter of the Benedictine Rule and its treatment of the 'steps of humility' (*gradus humilitatis*) that occurs just ahead at *In Ezr*. 3. (350.466–73). Cf. the further references to humility at *In Ezr*. 3 (348.386) and (349.407).

6 1 Pet. 5:5.

7 Ps. 64:14 (65:13).

which is the guardian of the virtues,[1] so that according to the precept of the wise man, the greater we are, the more we should humble ourselves in all things.[2]

[Neh. 3:13–14] And Malchijah son of Rechab built a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Dung Gate, as well as the Dung Gate. They *[349]* say that the site of the city of Jerusalem, 'being laid out on a gentle slope', inclines toward the north and east[3] in such a way that 'rainfall does not accumulate there at all but rather flows out like rivers through the eastern gates and swells the torrent of Kidron in the valley of Jehoshaphat, taking with it all the waste of the streets'.[4] And so it appears likely that the Dung Gate is the one through which refuse and filth were generally to be driven out. It is not in any way of less virtue and usefulness for all impure things to be removed from the city of the Lord than for those things which are pure to be collected into it. **/400/** They who build the Dung Gate in Jerusalem, therefore, are the ones who ordain to the ministry of the Holy Church those through whom the filth of the vices is removed from the minds of the elect, but also through whom people of corrupt mind are kept away from the boundaries of the Church while a shower of heavenly grace helps them and weakens[5] every impurity, so that, according to the psalmist, *all who do evil* are eliminated *from the city of the Lord*.[6] And because it is a sign of great perfection when through the merit of humility a person makes progress to such an extent that he can vigorously inspect his own errors and effectively purge what has been detected, rightly is it said that the same people who built the Valley Gate also constructed **a thousand**

1 Bede's wording here recalls Gregory *Homiliae in evangelia* 1.7.4 (CCSL 141:51.130–31): 'Knowledge is a virtue, and humility the guardian of virtue'. Cf. below, *In Ezr*. 3.466–73.

2 Ecclesi. 3:20.

3 Bede is mistaken here. Jerusalem inclines mainly towards the south, and the Dung Gate usually is thought to have been situated at the south side, at the bottom of the Tyropoeon Valley which bisects the city.

4 These quotations are borrowed from Bede's earlier work *On The Holy Places*: see *DLS* 1.3 (253.24–28). They derive in turn from Adamnan *De locis sanctis* 1.11 (CCSL 175:186.43–53), on which Bede's own treatment of holy sites is modelled. Bede's text is translated and discussed in Foley and Holder 1999: 1–25.

5 Though the manuscripts have *enervante*, 'weakens', the image is strange, and one wonders whether *everrente*, 'sweeps out' could be the correct reading.

6 Ps. 101:8 (100:8). In other words, ordained ministers are like the Dung Gate in that, like a gate, they are the means of removing the filth of sin, and also in that, like a wall, they guard the boundaries of the Church.

cubits of the wall up to the Dung Gate. For the number 1000 suggests perfection,[1] whereas a cubit suggests a work made by hands and arms. The faithful also by building along the wall of the holy city for a thousand cubits from the Valley Gate reach as far as the Dung Gate when, having received the grace of humility, they surrender themselves to good works with such great industry of perfection that they cast out from themselves not only all the debris of harmful action or useless speech but even of idle thoughts.

[Neh. 3:15] And Shallum son of Col-hozeh, the ruler of the pagus of Mizpah, built the Gate of the Spring. *Pagus* in Greek means 'village' in Latin. However, writers say that 'from the side of Mount Zion whose steep cliff faces the east, the spring of Siloa gushes forth inside the walls and at the foot of the hill. It flows south with a sporadic stream of water (i.e. the water bubbles up not continuously, but only /425/ at unpredictable hours and days) and often comes with a loud roar through hollows of the earth and caverns of very hard rock.'[2] It is said that this is the only spring that the city makes use of, 'and moreover it is not a perpetual one'.[3] Understand, therefore, that it is this spring that the gate referred to in this passage is named after, especially since it is plainly added:

[350] **[Neh. 3:15] And the walls of the Pool of Siloa up to King's Garden, and as far as the steps that come down from the city of David.** The pool of Siloa (which means 'sent'), where the man born blind was given light,[4] stands for the Lord Saviour who was sent by God the Father for our illumination. The spring of this pool can be very aptly understood

1 Gregory *Moralia in Job* 35.16.42 (CCSL 143B:1803.185–98). The same interpretation of the number 1,000 is given by Bede at *In Cant*. 5 (355.674–79) and *De templ.* 2 (211.787–212.789).

2 This quotation is borrowed verbatim from Bede *DLS* 2.4 (257.62–67). It is based in turn on Pseudo-Eucherius *De situ Hierosolimae* 9 (CCSL 175:238.43–46).

3 Cf. Jerome *In Hieremiam* 3.14.1 (CCSL 74:136.10–12): 'For Siloam is the only spring the city makes use of, and moreover it is not a perpetual one, and up until the present day the lack of rainfall is responsible not only for a scarcity of grain but also of drinking water'.

4 John 9:7; also Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:122.25), and Augustine *Sermo* 7 (CCSL 41:72.61–62). The spring that comes out just outside the walls on the east side of Jerusalem is the one usually known as Gihon. It was, however, joined by a long tunnel to a pool called the Pool of Siloam or Shiloah or Shelah (inside the walls near the Dung Gate) by King Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:30). Here, however, Bede appears to confuse the pool and the spring.

as the same Father from whom he was born, about which the psalmist well says: *For with you is the spring of life; in your light we shall see light*.[1] And the Spring Gate is built in Jerusalem when teachers are ordained in the Church to preach belief in divine eternity to the nations. The walls of the Pool of Siloa are built too when the very firm and invincible testimonies of the Scriptures, in which the mystery of the Lord's incarnation is described, are rooted in the mind of the faithful. Moreover these walls of divine utterances reach as far as the King's Garden when, having recognized the mysteries of the Lord's dispensation, we begin to bring forth shoots of the virtues with the help of that same most high king, our Lord God. They arrive as far as the steps that come down from the city of David when one has learned to advance by means of spiritual desires from the common life of the faithful to the things of heaven. For the steps that come down from the city of David to the lower parts of the city of Jerusalem are the aids of divine inspiration **/450/** or protection by which we are gradually aroused so that we might be able to reach the walls of the heavenly kingdom. For David made the steps by which we should ascend to his city when divine mercy taught us the order of the virtues by which we may seek heavenly things and when it granted us the gift of seeking these same virtues. Doubtless it is about these steps that the psalmist said: *Blessed is the man whose help is from you, Oh Lord; he has placed ascents in his heart*,[2] and so on until he says: *They will walk from virtue to virtue; the God of gods will be seen in Zion*.[3] The builders of the holy city arrive at these steps, therefore, after building the walls of the Pool Siloa and the King's Garden when, after the mysteries of the Lord's incarnation have been revealed whereby the Gentile world blind from birth has been cleansed and illuminated, and after the sprouts of good action have begun to grow through faith, holy teachers at the appropriate moment more diligently reveal the progress of the virtues to their hearers, whereby they may ascend to the vision of their Creator, namely him 'of the strong hand' or 'the desirable one', which is the meaning of the name 'David'.[4] Benedict, a father very reverend both in his name and in his life, realized that these steps especially consist

1 Ps. 36:9 (35:10).

2 Ps. 84:5 (83:6).

3 Ps. 84:7 (83:8).

4 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:103.11). cf. *In Ezr*. 1.663, where Bede uses the same etymological word-play on David's name to refer to Jesus.

[351] in humility when, interpreting our journey to celestial things to be designated by the ladder shown to the Patriarch Jacob, by which angels ascended and descended,[1] he distinguished in a very careful and pious examination the steps of the ladder itself as the increments and stages of good works that are performed through humility.[2] According to the literal meaning, however, the city of David is named Mount Zion because 'it is situated on the south side and towers over the city as its citadel'[3] and the greater part /475/ of the city lies below the mountain on the plateau of a lower hill. For this reason it is written in the Book of Kings: *But David captured the citadel of Zion, that is the City of David*;[4] and a little later on: *David then took up residence in the citadel and called it the City of David*.[5]

[Neh. 3:16] Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk,[6] ruler of half the town of Beth-zur, built up to a point opposite the tomb of David… Note that King David was buried not in Bethlehem, as some claim, but in Jerusalem;[7] and indeed this is not without a certain mystical reason.

1 Gen. 28:12.

2 See *Regula Benedicti* 7 (ed. Fry 191–202). St Benedict (*c.* 480–543), the father of Western monasticism and author of the Benedictine Rule. While allusions to the latter occur throughout Bede's exegetical works, this is the only time Bede refers to Benedict by name. Benedict's rule may have reached England as early as 597 with the arrival of Augustine and his companions whom Pope Gregory sent to convert the Anglo-Saxons. Clearly the Anglo-Saxons had an interest in the rule: the oldest surviving extant copy is of English provenance, while the first translation into a vernacular language was the work of Bishop Æthelwold, one of the leaders of the tenth-century English monastic reform movement, who translated the text into Old English and, following Carolingian precedent, saw to its universal implementation in England. The degree to which it was followed in Bede's day, however, is less clear. The reigning consensus is that it was just one of many rules known in eighth-century Northumbria and that it did not monopolize monastic practice as it would in later years, though its prominence at Bede's Wearmouth–Jarrow seems clear: on this point, see Gretsch 1973; Mayr-Harting 1976; Wormald 1976; Van der Walt 1986; Foot 1990; and DeGregorio 2005. As DeGregorio 2005: 349–50 has noted, Bede's mention of Benedict at this particular moment appears to be triggered by the word *gradus*, 'steps', in Neh. 3:15, which, when combined with his discussion of the virtue of humility just previously at Neh. 3:13, calls to mind the *gradus humilitatis* of *Regula Benedicti* 7.

3 Borrowed from Bede *DLS* 1.1 (252.5–6), which in turn borrows from Pseudo-Eucherius *De situ Hierosolimae* 3 (CCSL 175:237.11–14).

4 2 Sam. 5:7.

5 2 Sam. 5:9.

6 This Nehemiah is not to be confused with Nehemiah son of Helchias, the main protagonist of Book 3.

7 Cf. 1 Kings 2:10–11; 1 Chron. 29:26–28.

For just as David, who was born and anointed king in Bethlehem,[1] prefigured the Lord Christ who would be born from his own seed in that very place and worshipped as a king by the Magi,[2] so likewise when David died and was buried in Jerusalem, he symbolized the same Lord who would suffer and be buried in this same city but would very soon arise again from the tomb.

Therefore, beyond the Spring Gate and the walls of the Pool of Siloa, which reach into the King's Garden and all the way up to the steps that come down from the city of David, the dimensions of the holy city extend even to a point opposite the tomb of the same David, because he who preaches belief in divine eternity, the dispensation of the Lord's incarnation, and the fruitfulness of the Church as she cleaves to Christ (about whom he himself says, *My sister my spouse is an enclosed garden*)[3] declares to faithful listeners not only that the steps of good works whereby they may ascend to their eternal homeland should be imitated by them, but he also considers it necessary to remind them constantly of the mystery of the Lord's passion so that they might recognize that through him *who died for them and was raised again*,[4] they themselves also **/500/** will be lifted up to life from *the land and the shadow of death*[5] and ascend to the heavenly kingdom. Moreover, there properly follows:

[Neh. 3:16] …and up to the pool that was built with great labour and to the House of the Strong. The pool built with great labour can be understood not inappropriately as Divine Scripture, which, composed as it was by the work of the Holy Spirit, supplies us with the bath to expiate our sins as well as with the cup of the taste of salvation, and which, if changed into wine for us by the Lord (that is, if it has been translated into the spiritual sense), intoxicates us with an even more pleasing sweetness of truth. The House of the Strong is also here, because all who are accustomed to being refreshed by the abundant *[352]* streams of divine utterances by hearing and practising them are rendered strong and invincible against all the attacks of the ancient enemy. Beyond the tomb of David in the holy city, therefore, the pool built with great labour is situated, and next to it the House of the

1 Cf. 1 Sam. 16:1, 13.
2 Cf. Matt. 2:1–2.
3 Song 4:12.
4 2 Cor. 5:15.
5 Cf. Is. 9:1; Matt. 4:16; Luke 1:79.

Strong, because through the Lord's passion is revealed to us the depth of the Scriptures through whose abundance the hearts of the faithful are strengthened and the city of Christ rendered unconquerable to all enemies. For when the waters dry up or are blocked by an enemy, a city is easily captured; and if the ancient enemy were to remove the spring of God's word from us, nothing would prevent the savage assailant and destroyer from immediately ascending the citadel of our mind.

[Neh. 3:19] And next to him Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, built another stretch opposite the ascent of the strongest corner. The first wall of the city is built up to this point. Henceforth begins the second stretch, that is, of the inner wall about which we have spoken above.[1] **/525/** Thus in this description it is said that many workers built in front of their own homes; for very many homes in the city were either near or joined to the inner wall. After the construction of the outer wall, therefore, there follows a stretch of a second wall in our city also when after perfecting our deeds and our tongue, which are apparent even to men, we strive rather to please God in the inner parts of our thoughts in case even in our mind we presume to conceive anything of those things which may offend the eyes of the inner judge. And it is well said that the second stretch was built **opposite the ascent of the strongest corner**. For the 'strongest corner' is the Lord, who united the Jewish and Gentile peoples in faith and love for him, which is why he is called a 'cornerstone' in the psalm and in Isaiah.[2] The second stretch is built opposite the ascent of this corner when through the purity of devout thought we strive to reach a vision of our Creator and when, though still detained in this life, we sigh in constant desire for a vision of him. After this there follow the very many groups of workers who are reported to have built the second stretch, because the greatest structure of the Holy Church is in the protection of inner virtue, namely when we keep our *heart with all vigilance* since *from it flows this life*.[3] It would take too long to discuss these one by one and to treat them all with an eye to their spiritual meaning.

[Neh. 3:26] But the Nathinnites were living in Ophel as far as a point facing the Water Gate towards the east and the projecting tower. The

1 Cf. above *In Ezr*. 3.293–98.
2 Ps. 118:22 (117:22); Is. 28:16.
3 Prov. 4:23.

Nathinnites are said to be inhabitants of Gibeon,[1] who **/550/** used to serve with faithful devotion in the worship of the Lord's house according to the arrangement of Joshua son of Nun. Ophel was a tower of immense height not far from the temple. This is why it received the name Ophel (that is, 'darkness' or 'cloudy'), 'because it raised its head up into the clouds'.[2] In fact where in Zechariah it is written, *Oh cloudy tower of the flock, of the daughter of Zion*,[3] in the Hebrew 'the tower of Ophel' is written for 'cloudy tower'.[4] The book of Chronicles mentions this tower and shows in which part of the city it is when it states about King Manasseh (as was mentioned above)[5] that he built *a wall outside the City of David, to the west of Gihon in the valley*, *from the entrance of the Fish Gate in a circuit as far as Ophel*.[6] Thus, it was fitting with respect to location that the temple servants were dwelling in a tower near the temple. *[353]*

But according to the mystical sense too, the Nathinnites dwell in Ophel (that is, in a cloudy tower) when those who have been dedicated to God by the profession of a more perfect life do not cease either in their action or thought to remain always in the protection and height of the virtues, saying with the Apostle that *our dwelling is in heaven*.[7] The common crowd bears witness in wonderment to these people, saying: *Who are these that fly like clouds*?[8] Similarly, the Nathinnites dwell[9] in Ophel when all those distinguished by the religious habit have learned to penetrate with illuminated heart the hidden things of the Scriptures, about which it was said, *the dark water in the clouds of the air*[10] (that is, the mystical knowledge contained in

1 Cf. Josh. 9:16–27. On the Nathinnites**,** see above *In Ezr*. 1.535–39 and the accompanying note.

2 Jerome *In Esaiam* 10.32.9/20 (CCSL 73:408.31–33).

3 Micah 4:8. Although the reference is to Micah, the manuscripts indicate that Bede mistakenly wrote *Zacharia*.

4 As Sutcliffe 1935 has shown, when Bede refers to the Hebrew text of the Bible, it is almost certain that he is borrowing from some work of Jerome rather than consulting the Hebrew text itself; in the present passage, for example, Bede's knowledge of this Hebrew reading is taken from Jerome's commentary on Micah: see Jerome *In Michaeam* 2.4.8/9 (CCSL 76:474.250–53).

5 See *In Ezr*. 3.276–78.

6 2 Chron. 33:14.

7 Phil. 3:20.

8 Is. 60:8.

9 Reading *habitant* for *habitabant*: see Appendix 1. Cf. also *In Ezr*. 3.562 and 588.

10 Ps. 18:12 (17:12).

the prophets), and to meditate day and night on the reading of these. Concerning the abode of these people it is aptly added: **as far as a point facing the Water Gate towards the east and the projecting tower.** For the Water Gate is the Lord, **/575/** who waters us with the daily grace of his mercy so that we do not fail amidst the hardships of this life. The psalmist was yearning to enter this gate when he said: *Just as the stag desires springs of water, so my soul desires you, Oh God!*[1] It is appropriately recalled that this gate was placed towards the east, doubtless because the same Lord who intoxicates us with the torrent of his pleasure[2] so that we do not thirst also illuminates us with the gift of his visitation so that we do not remain blind in the darkness of our sins, according to what Zechariah says: *He visited us, arising from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*.[3] He himself also defends us with the guard of his protection so that we are not touched by the enemy, which is why there properly follows, **and** up to **the projecting tower**; understanding this, the psalmist said: *You have led me away, for you have become my hope, a tower of strength in the face of my enemy*.[4] Therefore, the Nathinnites dwell in
[354] Ophel up to a point facing the Water Gate towards the east and the projecting tower when all the faithful who are dedicated to the sacred readings rejoice to be intoxicated and illuminated by the grace of divine mercy, and always to be protected from the enemy by its help. And because after the present gifts of the virtues we ascend to see the glory of the man who is the Lord,[5] it rightly adds:

[Neh. 3:27] After it the Tekoites built another stretch out of the region, from the great eminent tower as far as the wall of the temple. For the wall of the temple is the body of the Lord Saviour about which he himself said to the Jews: *Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*.[6] Those who persecuted him destroyed this temple of his body in death, **/600/** but those who loved him saw it raised and lifted up to heaven in glory, and they do not cease to see him forever. Therefore, the building of the holy city reaches **from the great eminent**

1 Ps. 42:1 (41:2).

2 On difference between good and bad pleasure, see Bede *Epist. Cath.* (273.192–274.213).

3 Luke 1:78–79.

4 Ps. 61:3–4 (60:3–4).

5 'the glory of the man who is the Lord' = *claritatem dominici hominis*.

6 John 2:19.

tower as far as the wall of the temple when all righteous people, from the height of contemplation, to which even in this life they raise their mind, looking down on temporal things in order to desire celestial ones, in the next life really do ascend to observe the splendour of the Lord's incarnation, when even the glory of divine eternity is revealed.[1] And since a 'takua (*thecua*)' is a bugle or trumpet and the Tekoites are interpreted as 'buglers',[2] it is fittingly said that the Tekoites built this; for it is the function of teachers, whose *sound has gone out into all the earth*,[3] to reveal in his city (that is, to his people, the faithful) both God's present gifts and his future ones.

[Neh. 3:28] Above this as far as the Gate of the Horses the priests built, each man in front of his own house. Jeremiah mentions this gate and indicates that it is in the eastern part of the city when he writes typologically about the Church: *And the city shall be rebuilt for the Lord from the tower of Hananel*;[4] and a little afterwards: *up to the torrent of Kidron and as far as the corner of the Gate of the Horses on the east*.[5] Now horses, when they are put to good use, just as asses, camels and mules also do, sometimes represent peoples of the Gentiles who have been converted to the Lord, and at other times concerns for temporal matters that have been duly subjugated to the rule of the soul. And the priests built the wall of God's city up to the Gate of the Horses when, after the calling of the Jewish people, holy teachers **/625/** by spreading the word went on to lead the peoples of the Gentiles into the Holy Church. Similarly, they build up to the Gate of the Horses when they show satisfactory examples of living to those who enter the doors of the Holy Church in order to bridle the wanton motions of *[355]* their flesh or soul, or perhaps when they control their own thoughts with which they consider it necessary to worry about their own and their family's food and clothing[6] in such a way that these thoughts in no way impede the freedom of that mind with which they have resolved always to seek heavenly things.

1 Bede is saying that while it is possible for righteous people *even in this life* to reach a certain height through contemplative prayer, it is only *in the next life* that they will experience a full vision of God's glory. See DeGregorio 1999 for extensive treatment of Bede's views on contemplation.

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:109.9–11; 123.27–28).

3 Ps. 19:4 (18:5).

4 Jer. 31:38.

5 Jer. 31:40.

6 Cf. Matt. 6:31.

Here too it is properly added about those who were labouring, **each man in front of his own house**. This expression is repeated frequently in this construction of the holy city, and there is no need in our explanation to belabour how in the Holy Church everyone ought to build a wall of virtues in front of his own house and fortify his own mind against the attacks of the devil, so that he who *prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour*[1] cannot at any point break in, so long as everyone has fortified his own body and mind with strong faith in the Lord. But everyone also builds in front of his own home if he protects those who have been entrusted to his charge by scrupulous observance of regular discipline[2] so that they cannot be deceived either by an invasion of vices or by heretical persuasion. It would take a long time to explain by spiritual interpretation the individual buildings or builders of the holy city, which the experienced reader will very easily understand even though we remain silent. All we need note is that those who build the gates and the towers, by which means either the citizens may enter or the enemies be kept out, are none other than the prophets, apostles and evangelists,[3] through whom the form and order of faith and righteous action whereby **/650/** we should enter the unity of the Holy Church[4] have been ministered to us, and through whose words we learn how we may refute and repel the adversaries of truth. Those, on the other hand, who build the rest by their words are the pastors and teachers, whom the Apostle has appointed in the second place,[5] through whose industriousness up to this day the catholic faith which was built by the great architects of the Church is preserved throughout the world. And just as Nehemiah, by enumerating consecutively all the builders of the city, makes them forever memorable, so too the Lord, the Consoler of our poverty, records in heaven the names of all who build his Church among the elect. But let us also consider what remains.

[Neh. 4:1–2] Now it came to pass that when Sanaballat heard that we were building the wall, he became very angry and, being greatly incensed, he ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his brethren

1 1 Pet. 5:8.

2 'by scrupulous observance of regular discipline' = *custodia disciplinae regularis*: cf. *In Ezr*. 1.634–5 and the accompanying note.

3 Cf. 1 Cor. 12:28.

4 Cf. Eph. 4:13.

5 Cf. Eph. 4:11.

and a crowd of Samaritans said, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Are the Gentiles leaving them alone?' Obviously this is the anger of heretics, these the words of those who in vain call themselves 'Samaritans' (that is, the 'guardians of God's law')[1] despite the fact that they are greatly opposed to God and his laws inasmuch as, having been long separated from the House of David (that is, from the unity of Christ and the Church) by heresies or schisms or wicked works, they *[356]* are afraid to see the walls of the faith being built lest their own irreverence might be attacked and excluded; this is the ridicule of all who claim that *they know God, but in their deeds they deny him*,[2] for indeed the Samaritans used to serve the Lord but without repudiating their own ancient gods. Typologically, they are imitated today by Christians but in such a way that they also consider their stomach a god[3] **/675/** and pursue greed (which the Apostle clearly calls *slavery to idols*)[4] and, being slaves to the remaining allurements of the world, serve *created things* more *than the Creator, who is praised forever*.[5] And so, just like heretics, such people do not want the walls of the Church to be restored in case they are forced by the growing state of piety to retreat from their own impiety; such ones are wont to call the Jews (that is, confessors of the faith)[6] 'feeble', and say that they will be easily overthrown by the Gentiles, since in the daily battle of souls they love sins more than obtaining the victory palm of virtue. And because there are some among the heretics who deny that pardon is given even to those who do penance after falling, it is rightly added in their person:

[Neh. 4:2] Will they be able to build with the stones out of heaps of dust, burned as they are? For burnt stones from heaps of dust are used for building and replaced in the work of the holy city when either those who have been conquered by the fire of persecutions and have denied the faith, or those who have been subdued by the pleasures of sins and have lost the purity of good works, regain their senses through the Lord's mercy so that by steadfast profession they may reacquire the integrity of the catholic faith and, once they have amended their ways, may obtain the adornments of the virtues.

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:142.3).
2 Tit. 1:16.
3 Cf. Phil. 3:19.
4 Cf. Eph. 5:5.
5 Rom. 1:25.
6 Isidore *Etymologiae* 8.4.1.

[Neh. 4:3] But even Tobiah the Ammonite, who was closest to him, said: 'Let them build: if even a fox climb upon it, she will leap over their wall of stones'. Both the person and the words of this Tobiah are appropriate for heretics: the person because his ancestor Ammon was conceived from incest and drunkenness and at night and in a cave.[1] It is very clear to anyone that all these things apply to arch-heretics, whose entire origin derives from pleasures **/700/** of the flesh and impurity,[2] from the darkness of errors or iniquities, and from secret assemblies and not from the common creed of the Holy Church. Not in merit or truth but in self-exaltation and pride does this same Tobiah (that is to say, 'the good man of the Lord')[3] say that the wall of the holy city could be leapt over by a fox. Heretics can clearly be called foxes, which is why there is that saying in the Song of Songs, *Catch us*
[357] *the little foxes that ruin the vineyards*,[4] which is to say openly, 'Capture and bring into the light by exposing to ridicule the rotten and sly trickery of heretics, with which they strive to corrupt the fruitful minds of the faithful'. Thus, he says, **if a fox climb upon it, he will leap over their wall of stones** – if some heretic rises up against their assertion of faith, he will immediately overcome and throw down under his feet all confidence in their teaching, which they boast is founded in Christ as if built of strong stone. But the writer of this sacred history adds in imprecation what will come to blasphemers of this sort:

[Neh. 4:4] Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insult on their own head and cause them to be despised in a land of captivity, and so on. Similar to this is that saying of the psalmist speaking about the enemies of the elect as it were in the form of one wicked man: *His sorrow shall be turned on his own head: and his iniquity shall come down upon him*.[5]

[Neh. 4:9] And we prayed to our God and set watchmen on the wall day and night against them. This is the sole **/725/** refuge against all enemies of the Church – namely prayer to God and the zeal of teachers

1 See Gen. 19:30–38; cf. below *In Ezr*. 3 1902–08.

2 Reading *immunditia* for *immundiatia*: see Appendix 1.

3 Jerome *In Zachariam* 2.6.9/15 (CCSL 76A:797.222); and cf. Bede *In Sam*. 1 (47.1482–83). The Hebrew name *tôbîyāh* means 'Yahweh is my good' (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1996: 375), yet Bede, following Jerome, evidently thought it means 'the good man of the Lord'.

4 Song 2:15. Bede's exegesis of this verse in *In Cant*. 2 (226.585–227.617) makes the same correlation between foxes and heretics.

5 Ps. 7:16 (7:17).

who, meditating day and night on his law, fortify the hearts of the faithful against the attacks of the devil and his soldiers by preaching, consoling, and exhorting.

[Neh. 4:10] Moreover, Judah said: 'The strength of him who carries has given out, and the rubble is too great, and we will not be able to build the wall'. By 'Judah' he means the tribe of the descendants of Judah. He complains that the wall cannot be built because too much rubble had been piled up in the place where the wall was to be built that first had to be cleared away so that the foundations of the wall could be established on living ground. This accords with the parable of the house in the Gospel,[1] whose builder dug deep and having removed a heap of earth, laid the foundations on rock which no onrush of waters or winds could throw down. For first we must remove from our heart the rubble of earthly desires and next build upon the foundation of faith the sturdy and invincible wall of good works, for whoever strives to erect an edifice of holy action on the rubble and debris of base thoughts is deceiving himself; and instead of a house or a city he will discover, as soon as a storm of temptation beats against it, that he has built a ruin.

[Neh. 4:11] And our enemies said, 'Let them not know it nor understand until we come among them and kill them and cause the work to cease', and so on until it says: **I stationed the people in order behind the wall in a circuit, with their swords and spears and bows.**[2] These things are also always done in the spiritual edifice. For the unwearied enemy lies in waiting with his unclean companions (namely **/750/** malicious spirits and people) who constantly endeavour to impede and, in so far as they can, to assault the works of the faith and virtues whenever we are incautious, and they attempt to kill the mind of the faithful with the sword of depraved suggestion. But against these we must, according to the Apostle, take up the armour of God *so that* we may be able *to resist on the evil day and to stand perfect in all things*.[3] Now is it well said that he stationed the people **behind the wall in a circuit** with weapons so that, surrounded by a troop of armed men, the builders might press on in building the wall with a freer and securer hand. For the grades of the faithful are divided up: some build up the Church by adorning it with good works on the inside, while others, *[358]*

1 Cf. Matt. 7:25; Luke 6:48.
2 Neh. 4:13.
3 Eph. 6:13.

armed with the weapons of sacred reading, keep vigilant for heretics who attack the same Church.[1] The former in religious devotion strengthen their neighbours in the truth of the faith, while the latter wage a necessary battle against the weapons of the devil or of the vices with which they struggle to assault this same faith, and with pastoral solicitude repel the wolves lying in ambush from the Lord's sheepfold.
[Neh. 4:15] And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it had been reported to us, God frustrated their counsel, and we all returned to the walls, each man to his own work. In the spiritual edifice too, if we are always clothed with the apostolic armour,[2] the stratagem of the devil and his angels who desire to subdue us will be foiled.
[Neh. 4:16] And it came to pass from that day on, that half of the young men were doing the work, and the other half were ready to fight, and so on until it is said, **with one of his hands he did the work and with the other held a sword, /775/ for every one of the builders had girt his loins with a sword.**[3] For it should be noted not only that half of the young men did the work and half were prepared to fight, but also that these same young men who were doing the work were all equipped with a sword. For so great is the ancient enemy's craftiness, so great the fury of his malice when he fights against the Church, that not only preachers of the truth but even the very people of God themselves must always keep watch against his machinations, as though standing firm in battle. For the builders gird their loins with a sword when those who take pains to persevere in good works, and who take pains to govern those in their charge by means of an ordered regimen[4] (that is,
[359] to place the living stones in the edifice of the holy city in suitable arrangement), endeavour to restrain in themselves the laxness of wanton behaviour with the sharpness of God's word. And we should

1 Usually when discussing the grades of the faithful, Bede offers a threefold division of the married, the continent and, for the third category, either virgins or rulers: see *In Sam*. 1 (21.403– 12, 40.1221–25); *In Luc*. 5 (321.1019–26); *De tab*. 1 (31.1045–49 and 34.1167–35.1173); and *De templ*. 1 (163.636–41). The twofold division offered here separates the faithful into the laity on the one hand, whose good works help to build up the Church, and on the other those monastic teachers who use their learning and superior knowledge of the faith to safeguard the laity. Such a division is implied elsewhere in Bede: see, for instance, *In Cant*. 1 (209.749–59).

2 Cf. Eph. 6:13.

3 Neh. 4:17–18.

4 'by means of an ordered regime' = *regulari ratione*: cf. *In Ezr*. 1.634–35 and the accompanying note.

not pass over the fact that when David and Solomon were building this same city, nothing is said about armed builders or attacking adversaries; rather, the city destroyed by their wrongdoings is restored with greater labour and effort, firstly because the spiritual edifice, which is concerned with the salvation of souls, is such that, as soon as we are reborn in baptism through the faith and confession of the Holy Trinity, we are made, through God's grace, his city and house without any effort of our own; but if after our ablution in the sacred font we fall back into sins through the devil's seduction and the victorious enemy demolishes the defences of our virtues with the fire of the vices, it is necessary for us to repair those buildings of good works that we have lost through more serious efforts of prayer, mortification, vigils, alms, and a stricter life.[1] For **/800/** it is harder for us to be free of known enticements of the vices than unknown ones and less effort to avoid an unknown pleasure of the flesh than to reject a familiar one.

[Neh. 4:22] At that time also I said to the people: 'Have every man and his servant stay inside Jerusalem, and let us take our turns by night and day to work'. Notice how much zeal they had for working – they persisted in their task even at night. So too did the Apostle, who used to toil night and day with his hands so that he would not weary any of the believers by asking for food.[2] Unless perhaps the turns to work should be supposed to have succeeded each other in such a way that some would labour by day on the work of the wall while others would act as watchmen throughout the night against the incursions of their enemies. For the builders of our city also do both together, and the same people who build the Church by instructing the faithful also, by refuting unbelievers and deniers, prevent them from harming the Church.

[Neh. 5:1–4] Now there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren. And there were some who were saying, 'Our sons and our daughters are too numerous; let us take corn for their price, and let us eat and drink'. And there were others who were saying, 'Let us mortgage our fields, our vineyards and our homes, and let us get grain during the famine'. Still others were saying, 'Let us borrow money for the king's tax, and let us give up our fields and vineyards', and so on. The people desired to construct the city wall but

1 Cf. *In Ezr.* 2.694–707.

2 Cf. 1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Thess. 3:8.

were being hindered from the holy work by the severity of the famine. This famine had been caused not only by a scarcity of crops but also by the greed of the rulers, since they were demanding greater taxes from these people than they were able to pay. **/825/** We see that this
[360] occurs among us in the same manner everyday. For how many are there among God's people who willingly desire to obey the divine commands but are hindered from being able to fulfil what they desire not only by a lack of temporal means and by poverty but also by the examples of those who seem to be endowed with the garb of religion, but who exact an immense tax and weight of worldly goods from those whom they claim to be in charge of while giving nothing for their eternal salvation either by teaching them or by providing them with examples of good living or by devoting effort to works of piety for them?[1] Would that some Nehemiah (i.e. a 'consoler from the Lord') might come in our own days and restrain our errors, kindle our breasts to love of the divine, and strengthen our hands by turning them away from our own pleasures to establishing Christ's city![2]

But we should observe according to the literal meaning that the unhappy outcry of the afflicted people was attended by a threefold distinction. For some, compelled by the famine, were proposing to sell their own children to the more wealthy for food; others, sparing their children, wished rather to give up their fields and own homes for food; and some, by contrast, prohibiting the sale of both children and fields,

1 This passage rings strongly of the *Letter to Bishop Ecgberht*, which is virulent in its condemnation of those ecclesiasts 'who most sedulously demand earthly recompense from those who listen to them, but at the same time devote no attention to their eternal salvation by way of preaching, moral exhortation, or rebukes', *Epist. Ecg.* 7 (410), trans. McClure and Collins 347. The *Letter*'s attack on the levying of compulsory church dues in return for pastoral care is plainly echoed in the present passage's mention of 'an immense tax and weight of worldly goods' (*immensum rerum saecularium pondus ac vectigal*); cf. further *In Ezr.* 3.893–99, which speaks of those who seek a 'reward' (*questum*) for pastoral work; and *In Ezr.* 3.1866–74, which, more tellingly, rails against priests who demand 'payments due to their rank' (*sumptus quidem suo gradui debitos*). Such remarks connect *On Ezra and Nehemiah* with the *Letter*'s reforming agenda (see Introduction, pp. xxx–xxxvi); moreover, they add to the tiny body of evidence we have for compulsory church dues in Bede's Northumbria. For further discussion, see DeGregorio 2004: 12–13; and Blair 2005: 155–56. On the proper use of wealth by clerics and preachers, cf. above *In Ezr.* 1.282–96 and the accompanying note.

2 A striking remark, which demonstrates Bede's interest in the literal story told in Ezra–Nehemiah and his recognition of its value as a key to reform: see Introduction, pp. xxxii–xxxiii and DeGregorio 2004: 11–13, 16.

were urging that they should merely borrow money for the king's taxes, giving their fields and vineyards as a pledge until a fruitful supply of crops returned and they could restore to the money-lenders what they had borrowed.

[Neh. 5:7–8] And I rebuked the nobles and officials and said to them, 'Are each of you to exact interest from your own brethren?' And I called together a large meeting against them, and said to them: 'We, as you know, have bought back /850/ our brethren the Jews who were sold to the Gentiles, according to our means, and now you are selling our brothers, and we are buying them?', and so on until it says: **'I and my brethren and my servants have lent money and grain to very many people. Let us together not require that loan to be repaid!**[1] As the most excellent leader of the heavenly militia[2] and *wise architect*[3] of God's city, he first of all declared that he himself[4] had done what he wished the nobles and magistrates of the people to do, namely to give alms[5] to the poor and seek nothing from them save faithfulness to God's law and the building of his city. In this passage, it behoves us not to scrutinize the allegorical meaning but to observe the literal meaning of the text itself by performing it as diligently as we can,[6] namely so that quite apart from the daily fruits of almsgiving, we should take care whenever a general time of famine and want has afflicted the people not only to give poor people what we can but also to forgive that tribute which we have been accustomed to exact from our subjects as though by right, in order that the Father might forgive us our debts too.[7] Now this passage comes to a terrible conclusion when it says:

[Neh. 5:13] Moreover, I shook the folds of my robe and said, 'So may God shake out from his house and out of his labours every man who does not keep this word. So may such a man be shaken out and made a wanderer!' For whoever either refuses to show mercy on poor people or is not ashamed to demand from them, as if lawfully, what they do *[361]*

1 Neh. 5:10.

2 *dux militiae caelestis*: a phrase employed by Ambrose *Explanatio psalmorum* 39 (CSEL 64:218.5) and *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 5.97 (CCSL 14:167.1026–27); cf. Luke 2:13.

3 1 Cor. 3:10.

4 Reading *ipsum* for *ipse*: see Appendix 1.

5 Reading *elemosinam…dando* for *elemosinam…dandam*: see Appendix 1.

6 On the importance of the Ezra saga's literal meaning, cf. below *In Ezr.* 3.1174–78.

7 Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4.

not have to give, this person is shaken from his house (namely, is cast and shaken out from the fellowship of the Holy Church in which he believed he would remain forever) and **/875/** deprived of his labours, doubtless, that is, of the fruit of good works in which he believed that he had toiled admirably. For labours performed without piety cannot become fruitful before the Lord. But how greatly this reproach or curse of Nehemiah moved the hearts of all becomes evident when it is immediately added:

[Neh. 5:13] And the whole assembly said, 'Amen,' and praised God, and then it is added: **So the people did as he had said**. For when upon hearing his declaration they all responded 'Amen' and, praising God, did what Nehemiah had commanded, it is surely evident that they had not been forced by fear but had received his words in the inmost affection of their heart.

[5:14] Now from the day in which the king commanded me to be governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes (a total of twelve years), neither I nor my brethren ate the yearly provisions that were due to the governors, and so on. Explaining this by means of a type, the Apostle says that *the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But I have not used any of these things*.[1] For twelve years, Nehemiah and his brethren so lived under his leadership that they would not eat **the yearly provisions that were due to the governors**, so that by this he might mystically suggest that that work is an apostolic one when someone who has been promoted to be a ruler of God's people nobly undertakes the work of the ruler by building the Church but does not seek a reward for his work by asking for earthly goods from those whom he rules by preaching and living well.[2]

[Neh. 6:1] /900/ And it came to pass, when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall, and the rest until they say: **'Come and let us make a pact together in calves on one plain'.**[3] **But they were scheming to harm me. So I sent messengers to them saying : 'I am doing a great work and cannot go**

1 1 Cor. 9:14–15.

2 On the theme of clerical avarice, see above *In Ezr*. 3.825–37 and the accompanying note.

3 *in campo uno*. Bede evidently took *uno* in this instance as the word for 'one', but it is actually a place-name: cf. Neh. 11:35, Ezra 2:33 and 1 Chron. 8:12.

down, in case the work is neglected when I come and go down to you'.[1] The enemies of the holy city are urging Nehemiah to go down to the plains and to enter into a peace pact with them by together slaughtering calves as testimony to the arranged treaty, but he perseveres in *[362]* the mountains so that the devout work is not neglected. So too, heretics and false catholics want to have a fellowship of peace with true catholics but with this stipulation, that they do not agree to ascend to the citadel of ecclesiastical faith or duty themselves, but rather they compel those whom they see dwelling on the peak of the virtues to go down to the lowest depths of wicked works or dogmas. And it is well that they want to enter into a pact with Nehemiah on one plain, doubtless because they desire that all those whom they are able to seduce be relaxed in the same freedom of the broader life that they themselves follow; and it is well that they wish to enter into a pact with him by together slaughtering calves, because false brethren are eager to offer the sacrifices of their prayer and action to God together with true catholics, so that, when they are believed to be genuinely faithful, they might be able to corrupt these same true catholics through the proximity of their association. But Nehemiah, representing the person of faithful teachers, by no means agrees to go down to the impious nor **/925/** to be defiled with their sacrifices but remains devout in the virtuous works he has undertaken; and the more severely his enemies tried to frighten him, the more he himself strove to become terrifying to these same enemies by doing a good work. For this reason, it is said in what follows:

[6:9] They were all trying to frighten us, scheming that our hands would cease from the work and that we would rest. For this reason, I strengthened my hands all the more. Thus in the spiritual edifice too, because the cunning enemy tries always to obstruct our hands, let us always take care to strengthen them ourselves in good action with divine help.

[6:10] And I went into the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, privately. He said, 'Let us meet together in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the doors of the building, and so on until it says: **I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had spoken to me as if he had been prophesying, and Tobiah and Sanaballat had hired him. For he had taken money so that I might be**

1 Neh. 6:3.

frightened into doing this and commit a sin.[1] Pressured by the attacks of his enemies, Nehemiah enters the house of Shemaiah as though Shemaiah were his friend and brother but discovers that Shemaiah himself is a traitor and enemy, inasmuch as he had been corrupted by the gifts and friendship of foreigners. For the elect always have *conflicts without and fears within*,[2] and not just the apostles but the prophets too lived a life fraught *with dangers from the nation, with dangers from Gentiles, with dangers from false brethren*.[3]

[Neh. 6:15] Now the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty-two days. According to the Hebrews the month
[363] of Elul is the sixth month of the year, which is called September by the Romans.[4] And it is right that the wall of the holy city is completed in the sixth month of the year, **/950/** so that by this number the perfected action of the faithful – whether penitents or the innocent – might also be designated. For the perfection of a good work is usually designated by the number six, either because the Lord completed the creation of the world on the sixth day and rested on the seventh, or because he wished us to sweat with good actions within the Six Ages of this world but to hope for a sabbath rest for our souls in the seventh, which comes in the next life.[5] It is rightly completed on the twenty-fifth day of that same month, namely on account of the five bodily senses, by the aid of which we ought to do good works outwardly: for just as the simple number five is often a figure of these senses, so when this number is multiplied by itself to make twenty-five it designates these same senses with greater perfection.[6] Therefore, we complete the wall of Jerusalem on the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month when, diligently surrendering all of our bodily senses to divine servitude, we bring the pursuits of the virtues[7] which we have begun to a sure end and, with the Lord's

1 Neh. 6:12–13.

2 2 Cor. 7:5.

3 2 Cor. 11:26.

4 Cf. Bede *DTR* 11 (313.22).

5 Cf. Augustine *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.7.16 (CSEL 28:93.1–103.21). On the Six World Ages, cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 1.1201–28 and *DTR* 66–71 (445.1–544.97); on the allegorical meaning of the number six, cf. Bede *De tab*. 2 (66.967–67.88), which closely parallels some of the language of this passage.

6 Gregory *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 2.5.5 (CCSL 142:278.117–279.147).

7 *virtutum studia*. A favourite phrase of Bede's which he may have got from Cassian: see Bede *In Luc*. 3 (226.2363–64), which quotes Cassian *Conlationes* 23.3 (SC 64:141.11), which contains the phrase; also *Epist. Cath*. (190.276), *In Sam*. 4 (269.2442), *In Cant*. 4.6 (313.548), and *In Marc*. 2 (494.221) and 3 (562.857; 569.1080).

help, effectively complete whatever things we have begun to do faithfully in defence of catholic peace.

It is also fitting that the wall is said to have been completed in fifty-two days.[1] For the fiftieth Psalm – in which the prophet also prays specifically for the construction of this city, saying, *Deal favourably, Oh Lord, in your good will with Zion, that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up*[2] – is one of repentance and forgiveness.[3] On the fiftieth day of the Lord's resurrection, the Holy Spirit, through which not only the desire to repent is poured into us but also the gift of pardon **/975/** is conferred on those who repent, came to the primitive Church.[4] Now there are two precepts concerning charity, namely love of God and of neighbour,[5] in which, once pardon for sins has been granted to us by the Holy Spirit, we are commanded to endeavour to attain eternal life. It is therefore most appropriate that, when rebuilding the wall of the holy city that had been destroyed by the enemies, its citizens restore it in fifty-two days, because this, undoubtedly, is the perfection of the righteous in this life – namely that they should not only, by repenting through the grace of divine inspiration, set aright whatever sins they have committed, but afterwards adorn themselves with good works in love of God and neighbour.

[Neh. 6:16] And it came to pass, when all our enemies heard about this, that all the nations that were around us were afraid and disheartened, and they realized that this work had been done by God. Those who previously were seeking to frighten the builders of the holy city in order to hinder them from working now are themselves frightened when the construction of this same city is completed, and they are disheartened when they realize that its construction was begun and completed through God's authority. So too in the Holy Church, when the sturdy structure of charity, self-restraint, peace, and the rest of the virtues is erected, unclean spirits grow afraid and their temptation, put to flight by our strength, is repelled and makes our victory all the greater. This can be understood to apply equally to heretics and to *[364]*

1 On the allegorical meaning of the number fifty, cf. Bede *Hom*. 2.16 (297.270–299.326).

2 Ps. 51:18 (50:20).

3 Jerome *In Esaiam* 2.3.3 (CCSL 73:44.9–12). The same link between repentance and pardon and Psalm 50 is mentioned by Bede also in *Exp. Act.* 19 (79.74–77), *In Luc.* 3 (200.1328–33), *De tab*. 2 (54.473–77), and *De templ*. 1 (36.1223–28).

4 Cf. Acts 2:1–4.

5 Cf. Matt. 22:37–40.

false catholics, who, through the steadfast faith of good men which works through love,[1] are either set straight and reformed or, having been exposed so that people can be on their guard against them, are expelled from the boundaries of the Church.

[Neh. 7:1–2] /1000/ Now after the wall was built, and I had set in place the doors and appointed the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites, I commanded Hanani my brother, and so on until it says, **'The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot'.**[2] In the spiritual sense too, whenever the walls of the Church have been built by gathering new nations to the faith or by setting straight those who have erred, immediately the doors of regular discipline[3] must be set in place so that the ancient enemy, who *prowls around like a roaring lion*,[4] might not in any place be able to invade the fold of the faithful. Gatekeepers, singers, and Levites must be appointed to guard these same doors; it is clear that the character of all these accords with holy teachers. For the gatekeepers are those who have received *the keys to the kingdom of heaven*[5] so that they might receive those who are worthy and humble but prevent the proud and the impure from entry into the heavenly city by saying: *You have no part or lot in this business, for your heart is not right before God.*[6] The singers are those who with a devout voice preach the sweetness of this same heavenly homeland to their hearers; the Levites are those who always remain vigilant in regard to the observance of divine worship. Now Nehemiah ordered that **The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot** (that is, throughout the whole night), doubtless either in case the enemy invaded under the cover of darkness or else in case any of the citizens were to go out incautiously and be captured by the enemy and killed. Likewise, throughout the night of this age also, guardians of souls must act diligently to ensure that the observance of devout living is not neglected, allowing the devil to sneak in to disturb the company of the faithful or to seize and destroy one of their number. **/1025/** But
[365] when the *sun of righteousness*[7] appears and the light of future blessed-

1 Cf. Gal. 5:6.

2 Neh. 7:3.

3 'the doors of regular discipline' = *valuae disciplinae regularis*: cf. cf. *In Ezr*. 1.634–5 and the accompanying note.

4 1 Pet. 5:8.

5 Matt. 16:19.

6 Acts 8:21.

7 Mal. 4:2.

ness shines forth, no longer will there be a need for barriers of self-restraint,[1] because adversaries will no longer be given the ability to attack or tempt the faithful, since they will be condemned to eternal punishment along with their leader. Hence in his Apocalypse John says about the future glory of the holy city: *And its gates will not be shut ever, for there will be no night in that place*.[2]

[Neh. 7:3] 'And I appointed guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each in his own turn and each opposite his own house'. Guardians of souls must not be appointed from recent converts or from the common crowd but from those who, freed by the grace of God from the battle with the vices, have already trained themselves to keep their mind in Jerusalem (that is, in the 'vision of serene peace')[3] and who can say with the Apostle: *But our dwelling is in heaven*.[4] About these people it is well said that he appointed **each in his own turn**, namely so that when their course has been completed and they have been removed from this light, others may straightaway be chosen in their place to rule over the faithful; and that there may at no time be a shortage of those who make an effort to keep watch on behalf of the peace of the Holy Church *because of night-time fears*,[5] since the truth of prophetic word, in which it is said to the same Church, *In the place of your fathers*, *sons are born to you*,[6] runs continuously to the end of the age. It is also well added, **and each opposite his own house**. For the guardianship of the Holy Church is duly achieved only if everyone shows concern for all the faithful but makes a particularly diligent effort to take care of those over whom he has been put in charge by God's authority.

[7:4] /1050/ Now the city was exceedingly wide and great, and there were few people in the midst of it, and the houses had not been built. Typologically, these details correspond to that time when, as a result of God's word being spread far and wide by the apostles, the whole world received the new seed of the faith, and when churches had not

1 'barriers of self-restraint' = *claustris continentiae*: a phrase employed by both Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 140.6 (CCSL 40:2029.26) and Gregory *Moralia in Job* 6.33.52 (CCSL 143:321.25–26).

2 Rev. 21:25.

3 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

4 Phil. 3:20.

5 Song 3:8.

6 Ps. 45:16 (44:17).

yet been built but the peoples, as yet uninstructed, had merely begun to hear and receive the sacraments of the word.

[7:5] God put it into my heart, and I assembled the nobles and the officials and the common people, that I might make a census of them. And I found the census book of those who had come up first. When, therefore, not only the nobles and officials but also all the common people had assembled before him, he diligently endeavoured to make a census of their number so that, having made a review of the total of all the people, he might be able to determine which ones should dwell in the city of Jerusalem itself and which in the other cities.

[Neh. 8:1] And the seventh month had come and the children of Israel *[366]* **were in their cities. And all the people assembled as one man in the square which is before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.** As Nehemiah was seeking to make plans and decide who should reside in the city which they had built, the seventh month arrived, for it was not far off. For since the wall had been completed on the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month, not more than five days remained until the beginning of the seventh month. The whole of this seventh month, from its first day until the twenty-second, was consecrated with ceremonies prescribed by the Law; when these had been duly celebrated, only then **/1075/** did he return with the leaders and common people to decide who should be residents of the rebuilt city. The point to note here is the devotion and also the like-mindedness of the people who **as one man** (that is, with one and the same faith and love) came together at the Lord's temple; and they themselves asked their *pontifex*[1] to bring the book and recount for them the commandments of the Law that they must observe, so that along with the rebuilt city, a structure of good works pleasing to God might spring up in case, just as before, neglect of religion should lead to the ruination of the city as well. And it is appropriate that the city was completed in the sixth month and that the people gathered in it to hear the law in the seventh; for in the law there are six days for working and a seventh for resting.[2] And this, after we have done good work, is the form of our rest that is most beloved and most acceptable to the Lord – to abstain from servile work (that is, from sin) and devote ourselves to hearing and fulfilling his commandments with due dili-

1 See above *In Ezr*. 2.890 and the accompanying note.

2 Ex. 20:9–11. Cf. Bede *De tab*. 1 (244.127–28).

gence.[1] This is why the Feast of Trumpets, by whose blast the people, amidst their prayers and offerings, were more fervently moved to remembrance of the divine law, was placed in the beginning of this same seventh month also.

Even today too, according to the spiritual meaning, the construction of the holy city should be followed by divine reading and the frequent sounding of trumpets, no doubt because it is necessary that when a people has been initiated into the heavenly sacraments they should also, as occasion requires, be carefully instructed by divine discourses how they should live.[2] Now he says that the people assembled **in the square which is before the Water Gate**. I think that by the Water Gate is meant the gate in the courtyard of the priests which surrounded the temple on all its sides in a square, especially on the temple's eastern side where there was **/1100/** the Bronze Sea for washing the hands and feet of those going into the temple,[3] the ten bronze wash-basins for washing the victims,[4] and also the altar of holocaust between which and the temple Zechariah son of Berechiah was stoned to death.[5] The people did not have permission to enter inside the gate of this court but only the priests and ministers of the Lord; the people were accustomed to stand outside of this gate and especially in the square which was at its eastern side, in order to listen to the word or to pray. Therefore, it is appropriate that the people gathered before the Water Gate, because they were to be given spiritual drink by their high-priest[6] from the streams of the Scriptures. *[367]*

[Neh. 8:4] And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden step that he had made to speak upon, and so on until it is said, **And Ezra opened the book before all the people, for he was standing out above all the people.**[7] The book of Chronicles appears to mention this place where

1 Cf. Lev. 23:24; also Bede *Hom*. 1.23 (164.114–165.146).

2 Cf. On the instruction of catechumens, cf. *In Ezr*. 2.915–27.

3 Bede discusses the Bronze Sea at length in *De templ*. 2 (207.605–866).

4 Cf. Bede *De templ*. 2 (213.869–222.1208).

5 See Matt. 23:35; cf. Luke 11:51 and 2 Chron. 24:20–21. For more on the altar of holocaust, see Bede *De tab*. 2 (76.1361–84.1665).

6 'through their high priest' = *per antistitem*. Although the context requires that *antistitem* be translated as 'high priest', for Bede and his audience the duties of a bishop would have likely been called to mind: cf. *In Ezr*. 2.1587, for Bede's telling association of Ezra the *pontifex* with an archbishop (on which see Introduction, pp. xxxiii–xxxvi). In fact, the Latin word *antistes* is still used in the Roman Catholic Mass as a designation for a bishop.

7 Neh. 8:5.

it is said that Solomon *stood before the altar of the Lord, facing all the multitude of Israel, and he stretched forth his hands. For Solomon had made a bronze platform and had set it in the midst of the basilica, and it was five cubits long and five cubits broad and three cubits high. And he stood upon it.*[1] For 'in the midst of the *basilica*' means in the midst of the courtyard of the priests, which surrounded the greater *basilica* of the exterior courts on every side of the temple, about which it is written earlier in the same book, *he made the courtyard of the priests, and a great basilica*.[2] But Solomon, being a king, made a bronze platform, whereas Ezra, as a man of lesser power, built a wooden step to speak upon, **/1125/** just as Solomon or Moses also made the altar of holocaust out of bronze[3] and the descendants of the exiles replaced it with a stone one. But it should not be supposed that the wooden step holds a less perfect mystery than the bronze scaffold. For, as has often been said, just as bronze, for the length of time that it endures or for the sweetness of its sound, corresponds to the divine sacraments which fail with no passing of the ages and *their sound has gone out into all the earth*,[4] in the same way wood too fits most aptly with these same sacraments on account of the trophy of the Lord's passion. The *pontifex*,[5] therefore, stands out **above all the people** when he who receives the rank of teacher rises above the activity of the crowd by the merit of a more perfect life; but he stands **on a wooden step that he had made to speak upon** when he makes himself higher than the rest through exceptional imitation of the Lord's passion. Hence he deservedly obtains the trust to preach God's word freely; for he who disdains to imitate the Lord's passion in his own modest way has not yet mounted the wooden step from where he can stand above the weak, and for that reason it is necessary that such a scribe must preach the precepts of God in trepidation, fearing or blushing to propose that others must do what he has failed to do himself. And so it is aptly added in what follows:

[Neh. 8:7] And the people stood on their own level. For when those
[368] in charge are eager to outdo their subjects in good works by as much as they surpass them in honour, then their subjects are incited by their

1 2 Chron. 6:12–13.
2 2 Chron. 4:9. Bede quotes this verse earlier at *In Ezr*. 2.401–02.
3 Cf. 2 Chron. 4:1; Ex. 38:30;
4 Ps. 19:4 (18:5).
5 See above *In Ezr*. 2.890 and the accompanying note.

good examples and, now devout, they carry out the duties appropriate to their station in life;[1] and admonished by their pious exhortations, **/1150/** they delight to pour forth copious tears for the errors they have committed or even for desire for the heavenly kingdom. Whence at this point also it is aptly added:

[Neh. 8:9] All the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. But because the same holy teachers who move the minds of their hearers to tears both with holy readings and with their devout exhortations also assuage those tears when they promise their hearers that eternal joys are to follow, it is rightly added:

[Neh. 8:10] And he said to them, 'Go and eat fat food and drink sweet drink, and send portions to him who did not prepare anything for himself, because it is the holy day of the Lord, and do not be saddened'. For it is a holy day of the Lord for us when we take pains to hear and carry out his words. On this day it is proper that, however much outwardly we have endured the obstacles of tribulations, we should be *rejoicing in hope*,[2] in keeping with the Apostle's saying: *As if sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*.[3] On this day we are commanded also to eat fat food and drink sweet drink – that is, to rejoice over the abundance of good action bestowed on us by God and over the very sweetness of hearing God's word. For sweet drink is wine sweetened with honey, which is why in Greek it is called οἰνόμελι.[4] But from this same most healthful feast of our mind we are also instructed to send portions to him who did not prepare anything for himself, namely so that we take care to strengthen the weaker consciences of our neighbours either by the example of pious action or by the sweetness of devout advice, in order that their souls too might, according to the psalmist, be replenished with an abundance of heavenly blessing as though *with fat and rich food*[5] and might praise the Lord's name with exulting lips. Now it behoves us to imitate this passage even in the literal sense,[6] **/1175/** namely so that when on festival days, once our prayer, reading of the psalms, and studies are complete, we arrange to attend to the needs of the flesh with food, we should remember to give a portion also to

1 Cf. *In Ezr*. 3.1396–98.
2 Rom. 12:12.
3 2 Cor. 6:10.
4 Cf. Isidore *Etymologiae* 20.3.10.
5 Ps. 63:5 (62:6).
6 On the imitation of Scripture's literal sense, see above, *In Ezr*. 3.859–65.

paupers and pilgrims.

[Neh. 8:14–15] And they found written in the Law that the Lord had commanded in the hand of Moses, that the children of Israel were to live in tabernacles during a feast in the seventh month, and that they should proclaim and spread this word in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying: 'Go out into the mountain and bring back branches of olive', and so on. These matters are written about more fully in Leviticus,[1] and it is also written there that they were ordered to be done in memory of that very long journey, on which the Lord, leading
[369] his people out of Egypt, made them dwell in tabernacles in the desert for forty years, daily revealing to them the precepts of his Law through Moses. Moreover it was ordered that the setting up of tabernacles (which in Greek is called σκηνοπηγία)[2] was to be done every year for seven days, i.e. from the fifteenth day of the seventh month to the twenty-second. It is well worth our while to make a thorough examination of the mystery of this observance through spiritual investigation, especially since in the gospel the Lord deigned to attend this same feast and, as he addressed the people who gathered there, dedicated it with his most holy words.[3] Our fathers too, therefore, were set free from slavery in Egypt through the blood of a lamb and were led through the desert for forty years that they might come to the Promised Land when through the Lord's passion the world was set free from slavery to the devil and through the apostles the primitive church was gathered and was led as it were **/1200/** through the desert for forty years until it came to the homeland promised in heaven, because in imitation of the forty-day fast which Moses and Elijah and the Lord himself fulfilled,[4] the primitive church used to lead a life of great continence, thirsting always for its eternal homeland, and having set itself completely apart from all the distractions of this world, conducted its life as though in secret in daily meditation on the divine law.[5] In remembrance of this time, we too ought to dwell in tabernacles, leaving our homes[6] – that is, having forsaken the cares and

1 Lev. 23:34–43.

2 Cf. John 7:2 and Ex. 23:16; Isidore *Etymologiae* 6.18.9. Cf. above *In Ezr*. 1.1037–44, 1091–97.

3 Cf. John 7:2–14.

4 Cf. Ex. 24:18 and 34:28; Deut. 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Matt. 4:2.

5 On the connection between the returnees, the primitive church, and monasticism, see above *In Ezr*. 1.624–35 and the accompanying notes.

6 Reading *de habitaculis nostris* for *de tabernaculis nostris*: see Appendix 1.

pleasures of the world, we ought to confess that we are pilgrims in this life and have our homeland in heaven,[1] and desire that we may arrive there all the more quickly; this too in a holy feast in the seventh month (i.e. in the light of celestial joy) when the grace of the Holy Spirit, which was commended by the prophet as sevenfold,[2] fills our heart. We are ordered to remain in these tabernacles for seven days because during the entire time of this life, which we accomplish in as many days,[3] it behoves us to bear in mind that, like all our fathers, we are dwellers and pilgrims on earth in the eyes of the Lord.

[Neh. 8:15] 'Go out', he says, **'into the mountain and bring back branches of olive, and branches of the most beautiful wood, and branches of myrtle, and boughs of palm and branches of shady wood, to make tabernacles, as it is written'.** Let us too go out from the dwelling, so to speak, of our general thoughts onto the height of meditating frequently on the Holy Scriptures and from there let us gather for ourselves as it were branches of the olive, i.e. the fruits of mercy with which by restoring the poor **/1225/** we shade ourselves from the *[370]* heat of tempting vices, and the branches of the most beautiful wood (which the Jews call 'cedar'), no doubt the fruits of love, the most beautiful and most excellent of all the virtues, for the sake of which our Lord too ascended the wood of the cross for our salvation, and as long as we imitate his passion as far as is possible, we are assuredly protected by branches of the most beautiful wood. Let us also bring myrtle branches in mortification of lusts and all other vices, for the Magi, by offering myrrh to the Lord, by this gift figuratively taught that those who are of Jesus Christ should crucify their flesh along with vices and lusts;[4] likewise, whoever can say, *For we are the good odour of Christ to God in every place*,[5] gathers myrtle branches to make shade for himself. Let us also gather boughs of palm which adorn the conqueror's hand, so that we may always keep our mind victorious over gluttony, anger, avarice, and the rest of the vices, and always take care to be stronger than all our enemies so that in the future we may deserve to be companions[6] of those about whom John says in his

1 Cf. Phil. 3:20.

2 Is. 11:2–3.

3 Cf. *In Ezr.* 1.1073–4, and the accompanying note.

4 Cf. Gal. 5:24.

5 2 Cor. 2:14–15.

6 *mereamur esse consortes*: a phrase perhaps borrowed from *Regula Benedicti* prol. 50 (ed. Fry 166).

Apocalypse: *They were standing before the throne in the sight of the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands*;[1] and let us gather branches of shady wood too, that is, the ornaments of the rest of the virtues. From all of these things we make mystical tabernacles for ourselves when, delighted by good works, we remove our entire mind from worldly allurements.

[Neh. 8:16] So the people went out and brought back and made tabernacles for themselves, each man on his dwelling, and in his courtyards, and in the courtyards of the house of God, and in the square of the Water Gate, and the square of the Gate of Ephraim. /1250/ 'On the dwelling' means 'on the roof of the houses', for in Palestine they do not have sloping roofs on the houses but the tops of all houses are flat and covered with beams and boards.[2] This is why in the Law it is commanded that whoever builds a new home should make breastworks all round the roof so that no one will fall from it and die.[3] And so each one of us goes out and makes tabernacles **on his dwelling** (i.e. on the roof of his home) when, rising by means of the mind above the abode of his body, he tramples down his harmful emotions with constant meditation on heavenly light and liberty. We do the same thing in our courtyards too when, with a mind burning for heavenly things, we stand as it were outside the world and desire to leave its dwelling-place as quickly as possible; and we also do this **in the courtyards of the house of God** when, even though we are not yet allowed to enter the courtyard of the heavenly dwelling, we nonetheless lay the whole memory and seat of our thought[4] in its vicinity; and we do this
[371] **in the square of the Water Gate** also when, as our heart expands on the path of God's commandments,[5] *just as a stag desires springs of water, so does* our *soul desire the living God*;[6] and we do this also **in the square of the Gate of Ephraim** (that is, 'he who bears fruit' or 'he who

1 Rev. 7:9.

2 Cf. Bede *XXX quaest* 13 (305.7–11).

3 Cf. Deut. 22:8.

4 Cf. Cassiodorus *Expositio psalmorum* 50.19 (CCSL 97:467.607), for the phrase 'seat of thought' (*cogitationis sedes*).

5 'as our heart expands on the paths of God's commandments' = *dilatato corde nostro in via mandatorum Dei*. Cf. the similar phraseology of *Regula Benedicti* prol. 49 (ed. Fry 164): *dilatatio corde inenarrabili dilectionis dulcedine curritur via mandatorum Dei* '…we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love' (trans. Fry 165). But cf. also Ps. 119:32 (118:32).

6 Ps. 42:1–2 (41:2–3).

is growing')[1] when we advance in the same fullness of a free heart to such an extent that, after the gates of righteousness have been opened for us by the Lord, we always grow to salvation[2] in him and merit to abound every day with greater fruits of good action.

[Neh. 8:18] And he read from the Book of the Law of God each day, from the first day until the last; and they celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the custom, there was an assembly. The literal **/1275/** sense is clear to this extent: the Feast of Tabernacles[3] itself was customarily celebrated for seven days (i.e. from the fifteenth moon of the seventh month to the twenty-first); then, on the eighth day (i.e. the twenty-second day of the month), a second assembly of the people was held, an assembly notable for its greater festivity. For it is written in Leviticus: *From the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in all the crops of your land, you shall celebrate a festival of the Lord for seven days; on the first day and on the eighth there will be a sabbath, that is a day of rest. And on the first day you shall take for yourselves the fruits of the most beautiful tree*,[4] and so on. Therefore, for the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, Ezra read to the people from the Book of the Law of God, doubtless because this is our true feast of the mind in this life – that each day (i.e. through all the good works by which we are illuminated by the Lord), we should make time for reading, hearing, and performing his words with a resolute heart. But this Feast begins 'on the fifteenth day of the month when the moon is at its fullest in the evening'[5] when all the obscurities of our mind are dispersed by the most luminous light of Christ; and the eighth day of the sabbath (i.e. of rest) follows it – namely, at the moment of our resurrection in the life to come by whose joys in our present life we are uplifted in hope, but which we will then enjoy in reality when that most longed-for[6] gathering, the whole assembly of the saints (both of angels and of human beings), having been gathered in their Creator's sight, and never to be separated, will rejoice.

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:65.26).
2 Cf. 1 Pet. 2:2.
3 Cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 1.1036–37.
4 Lev. 23:39–40.
5 Jerome *In Zachariam* 3.14.16 (CCSL76A:895.690–1).
6 Reading *exoptatissima* for *exoptissima*: see Appendix 1.

[9:1–2] On the twenty-fourth day of this month, the children of Israel came together with fasting and with sackcloth, and earth upon them. And the seed of the children of Israel separated themselves from every foreigner, and so on. **/1300/** One should note the devotion of the people reformed after the captivity: when the feast which had been commanded by the Lord's Law had been duly completed, after just one day's intermission, they immediately came together of their own accord with fasting and with repentance, and diligently carried out
[372] what on the days of sacred readings and rejoicing they had heard must be done by separating themselves in both mind and body from the fellowship of those who were proven to be alienated from the Lord and his worship, lest through the association and examples of the wicked they should again fall into the evils of captivity and hardship which, they discerned, they had just at that time barely escaped after long revolutions of times and ages. And what are we to reflect on mystically about these matters except that, following the examples of such people, whatever we have learnt in a public meeting or reading[1] should be done, we should reflect on again with mutual discussion among ourselves, and we should search out with careful scrutiny the ways we can fulfil each duty with the reproof of our heart or body. The immense industry of their more reformed life is proven when it is added:

[Neh. 9:3] And they rose up to stand, and they read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God four times a day, and four times at night they confessed and prayed to the Lord their God. For who would not be amazed that such a great people had such extraordinary concern for devotion that four times a day – that is, at the first hour of the morning, the third, the sixth and the ninth, when time was to be made for prayer and psalmody – they gave themselves over to listening to the divine law in order to renew their mind in God and come back purer and more devout for imploring his mercy; but also four times a night they would shake off their sleepiness **/1325/** and get up in order

1 *in publica synaxi vel auditorio*. The Greek noun *synaxis* (from *sunagein* 'to bring together') means 'a gathering' or 'an assembly' (Souter, s.v. 'synaxis') and is related to the word 'synagogue', i.e. a place where gatherings are held. Early Christian writers, however, used it in reference to any assembly of a religious nature, such as the Mass and, particularly in monastic contexts, the Office, e.g. Cassian *Conlationes* 8.16 (SC 54:23.10); Benedict *Regula Benedicti* 17.7 (ed. Fry 212). For orientation, see Dix 1945: 36–47. Presumably *auditorium* in this context means 'listening to something read from Scripture': cf. below *In Ezr*. 1.1331.

to confess their sins and to beg pardon. From this example, I think, a most beautiful custom has developed in the Church, namely that through each hour of daily psalmody a passage from the Old or New Testament is recited by heart[1] for all to hear, and thus strengthened by the words of the apostles or the prophets, they bend their knees to perseverance in prayer, but also at night, when people cease from the labours of doing good works, they turn willing ears to listen to divine readings.[2]
[Neh. 9:6] And Ezra said, 'You yourself, Oh Lord, you alone made the heaven, the heaven of heavens, and all their host, the earth and all that is on it, and so on up until the end of his prayer or confession. It was said above that they were confessing their sins and the sins of their fathers; here, when Ezra prays, it is shown more fully how this was done. But where he says at the end,
[Neh. 9:38] 'Because of all this, therefore, we ourselves are making a covenant and writing it down, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are signing it', and so on, it is shown more clearly with what gracious devotion all the various persons made a new assembly after the Feast of Tabernacles, namely so that, after purging themselves with resolved purpose from the contagions of their wrong-doings, they *[373]*
might unite themselves to the divine covenant and confirm its terms both by word and in writing. Thus separated from association with the ungodly, they would more confidently complete the work they began long ago, i.e. namely to choose citizens from among the devout who were suitable for the rebuilt city.
[Neh. 10:1] Those who signed it were Nehemiah, Athersatha[3] son of

1 *ex corde dicatur*: the phrase echoes *Regula Benedicti* 9.10 (ed. Fry 204), which treats the scriptural readings for the Night Office. Placed after the psalmody, these were brief and repeated often so that the monks could memorize them. See DeGregorio 2005: 357–59 for further comment.

2 The Christian custom of reading from Scripture after the psalmody did indeed derive, as Bede gathers, from Jewish practice. In the ancient synagogue, Jews recited psalms and read from the Torah and the Prophets on such occasions as sabbaths, festivals and fast days (cf. Luke 4:15; Acts 13:27, 15:21). In its Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, the early Christian Church followed this precedent, supplementing it with readings from the New Testament as well, and this, in turn, provided the core framework for the early monastic Office, which placed readings from the prophets and apostles after the recitation of the psalms during morning and evening prayer: see, for example, *Regula Benedicti* 9–19 (ed. Fry 202–16). For discussion of these developments, see Dix 1945: 37–40, 470–72; Jungmann 1959: 278–87; and Vogel 1986: 301–03.

3 This word, quoted in Book 1 at Ezra 2:63, is not a name, as Bede appears to think, but a Persian title (in Hebrew *hattiršātā*) meaning 'the Governor'.

Hacaliah. /1350/ Another translation[1] has 'Nehemiah who is Athersatha', for Nehemiah had two names, which is why it is also specifically added, **son of Hacaliah**. This same point is suggested more clearly above when it is said: **And Nehemiah (he is Athersatha), Ezra the scribe, and the Levites who interpreted to all the people, said, 'This day is sacred to the Lord our God'.**[2]

[Neh. 10:31] And if the peoples of the land bring in things to sell or any things of use on the sabbath day to sell them, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or on any holy day. We too should always keep a spiritual sabbath, should always take a rest from servile work (i.e. sin), should always make time for and consider that the Lord himself is God,[3] so that after such a sabbath, when we have been freed from the sins of conscience, we may come to the sabbath of future glory in heaven.[4] But the peoples of the land seek a way to profane our sabbath by bringing in all sorts of things to sell us on the holy day because unclean spirits try hard to pollute the cleanness of our heart,[5] and once they have received the payment of our consent, they heap on us the enticements of the vices in order to defile the day of greatest holiness, i.e. to darken the light of our devout thought or action with the sins they have sent in. But we should entirely shun merchandise of this sort with the walls of our closed-off city, i.e. with the protection of a more perfected life.

[Neh. 10:32] And we will make ordinances for ourselves, to give the third part of a shekel every year for the work of the house of our God,

1 'Another translation' = *Alia translatio*. Corresponding neither to Esdras A (which does not contain this section of Nehemiah) nor to the Old Latin of the Vercelli manuscript (which reads *et supersignantes neemias filius athali et sedecias filius sereas* – fol. 118v, col. 2), this variant may be one Bede found in the work of a previous writer, or possibly one he obtained from Jerome's hexaplaric text of Esdras B, if indeed he had access to it in the Codex Grandior: see Introduction, pp. xix–xxi.

2 Neh. 8:9.

3 Ps. 46:10 (45:11).

4 Cf. Augustine *Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis* 44.9 (CCSL 36:385.10–14). In a homily, Bede distinguishes the 'spiritual sabbath' further as follows: 'Indeed by the fleshly sabbath, which was kept according to the letter, the people were ordered to keep free from all servile work on the seventh day. [The meaning of] the spiritual sabbath, in the light of the sevenfold spiritual grace which we have received, is that we should remain on holiday from the unrest of the vices not only on one day, but every day' – *Hom*. 1.23 (164.114–19), trans. Martin and Hurst 1:226.

5 Cf. Prov. 22:11.

and so on until they say, **and we will not forsake the house of our God.**[1] All these matters which **/1375/** are contained in this chapter are relevant to the care of the Lord's house and his ministers and services, and this excellent order of religious life ought to be imitated by us too in a spiritual manner today, namely that first the descendants of the exiles purified themselves from the pollution caused by the Gentiles, then they were sanctified by keeping the sabbath (which stood prominently among the first commandments of the Law)[2] and only then did they turn all their attention to carrying out the observance of divine worship in other respects – for we must first be cleansed from evils and only *[374]* then equip ourselves for good works. However, it would take quite a long time to discuss allegorically in what order we must carry out each of these in a spiritual manner with respect to the worship of the Lord, and this should be done rather[3] in the Book of the Law itself.[4]

[Neh. 11:1] Now the rulers of the people settled in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one part of every ten to live in the holy city Jerusalem, while the remaining nine parts were to stay in their own cities. The arrangement was now completed. It was begun as soon as the city was made, but until the total number of the people had been counted and the feast of the seventh month had been completed, it was impossible to determine who should reside in the holy city itself and who in the other cities. Now it is consistent with the figures of the sacraments that the rulers of the people are reported to have settled in Jerusalem. For it is proper that those in charge of the Holy Church should surpass the common people in the merits of their life by as much as they surpass them in the greatness of their power.[5] For the remaining cities of Israel represent the devout lifestyle of the common people of God, whereas the act of settling **/1400/** in Jerusalem specifically represents the conduct of those who, having already overcome the struggle of the vices, draw near to the vision of heavenly peace[6]

1 Neh. 10:39.

2 Cf. Ex. 20:8.

3 Reading *magis* for *magni*: see Appendix 1.

4 By 'Book of the Law' Bede evidently means the Pentateuch. His point at the end of this sentence appears to be that the most appropriate place for an extended discussion of the allegorical meaning of the commandments of the Law would be a commentary on the Pentateuch, rather than one on Ezra–Nehemiah.

5 Cf. *In Ezr.* 3.1145–48.

6 Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

with an unimpeded mind, according to the psalmist's saying: *The Lord loves the gates of Zion above all the tabernacles of Jacob*.[1] Hence it follows that the reason that a tenth part of the people chosen by lot take their dwelling in Jerusalem but the remaining nine parts reside in their cities is doubtless that it is a mark of the perfect (namely of those who wholly keep the precepts of the Decalogue in the love of God and neighbour) to draw near in mind to the heavenly secrets and, so to speak, to imitate the peace of highest blessedness amidst the whirlwinds of this transient life; and yet the door to eternal life also remains open to those who keep God's general commandments, according to what the Lord declares in the Gospel to the rich man who questioned him.[2] For such people dwell as it were in cities given to them by the Lord because by keeping the sacred law they remain constantly vigilant to defend themselves from the attacks of the ancient enemy. But those who wish to be perfect and follow the Lord by selling all their belongings and giving them as alms for the poor[3] are those who dwell as it were *in the citadel of Jerusalem*[4] and next to the temple of God and the ark of the covenant because they approach the grace of their Creator in a more sublime way. It is well said that their dwelling in the holy city was granted to them not by the foresight of human choice but by the outcome of a lot, just as during Joshua's time the ownership of the rest of the cities was given to the children of Israel by lot,[5] no doubt because both the small things of the small man and the great things of
[375] the great man **/1425/** come about not through the freedom or industriousness of his own will but by the gift of the hidden judge and provider.

[Neh. 11:2] And the people blessed the men that willingly offered themselves to settle in Jerusalem. We too should make the sublime life of the elect, which we cannot follow by imitating it, ours by praising and venerating it.[6] It should be noted according to the true record of sacred history that there were no others who are said to have settled in Jerusalem than those who were from the tribe of Judah and

1 Ps. 87:2 (86:2).

2 Cf. Matt. 19:17.

3 Cf. Matt. 19:21.

4 1 Macc. 13:49.

5 Cf. Josh. 1:6. On the division of the land by 'lot', see above, *In Ezr*. 1.356–59 and the accompanying note.

6 On the veneration of the saints, cf. above, *In Ezr*. 2.1118–28.

Benjamin and the Levites.[1] For it clearly goes on:
[Neh. 11:3] And every one settled on his own property in their cities: Israel, priests, Levites, Nathinnites, and descendants of the servants of Solomon, and then it adds: **And in Jerusalem there settled some of the children of Judah and Benjamin**,[2] and so on. By these words it is clearly taught that all Israel (i.e. the ten tribes) were dwelling in their cities, in which even the priests and the Levites used to retain a share decreed to them by the Law.[3] By contrast, those who had been chosen by lot from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin were dwelling in Jerusalem along with some from the priestly and levitical tribe. For the tribe of Benjamin used to live there from ancient times because that city succeeded to it by lot,[4] whereas the tribe of Judah entered there from the time of David when he made it the capital of the whole Israelite kingdom,[5] and the tribe of Levi was added to them from the time when the ark of the covenant was brought to that place[6] and God's altar and temple built. Consider too the following verses of this book and you will find that it calculates the inhabitants of Jerusalem from these tribes alone and even precisely adds the sum of all of them.[7] But when **/1450/** the catalogue of these ends, Scripture still took pains to add in which cities the other part of these same tribes settled, for it goes on: **[Neh. 11:25] Some of the children of Judah settled in Kiriath and its daughters,** and so on until it says, **And they made their home in Beersheba as far as the Valley of Hinnom.**[8] For Beersheba was the boundary of Judah on the southern side, whereas the valley of the descendants of Hinnom was to the north next to Jerusalem on the east side.[9] Finally, the cities of the descendants of Benjamin are recounted in a similar order, and the sentence which is added after they have been counted,

1 Jerusalem belonged to the tribe of Benjamin by lot – see above, *In Ezr*. 1.356–59 – and to Judah by conquest – see below, *In Ezr*. 3.1443–46.

2 Neh. 11:4.

3 Rather than receive their own territories, the priestly tribe had permission to dwell on the territories allotted to the other tribes: cf. above, *In Ezr*. 1.356–59 and the accompanying note.

4 Cf. Josh. 18:28.

5 Cf. 2 Sam. 5:6–12.

6 Cf. 2 Sam. 6:1–15.

7 Cf. Neh. 11:4–19.

8 Neh. 11:30.

9 The Hinnom Valley is in fact not on the east, but to the south and west of Jerusalem. Evidently Bede confused its position with that of the Kidron Valley: see May 2001: 81.

[Neh. 11:36] And of the Levites portions of Judah and Benjamin,
[376] means that the Levites according to the decree of the law received a lot on the property of the descendants of Judah and Benjamin. Let this much be said briefly concerning the historical sense. Concerning all these matters, if it delights you to hear also some allegorical meaning which is appropriate for our actions, Judah is interpreted as 'he who confesses', Benjamin 'the son of the right hand', and Levi 'accepted'.[1] The reason that the tribes of all of these dwell partly in Jerusalem and partly in cities given to them by God is that the stages of progress of the faithful are many and diverse,[2] and for them there are also many mansions in our Father's house in heaven,[3] as we have taught above.[4] Some are content to observe God's general commandments – not to commit murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to speak false testimony against a neighbour, to honour father and mother, and to love neighbours as themselves[5] – others try to lay hold of the narrower stronghold of the perfect life, yet they all, each man according to his own calling, **/1475/** praise and confess the grace of their Creator, and they are children of the everlasting kingdom which is in his right hand and are taken up by him to life when the moment of that separation will come in which *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left behind. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left behind*.[6]

[Neh. 12:1] Now these are the priests and Levites[7] **who went up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah**, and so on. Here leaders of the priests are described together with their brethren (i.e. the lesser priests and Levites), those ones who came up from the Babylonian captivity with Zerubbabel and Jeshua son of Jehozadak. Once these have been set forth, there are also added those who, from

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:152.15; 62.24; 68.7–8); cf. Gregory *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 2.10.15 (CCSL 142:390.368).

2 Cf. Bede *Hom*. 1.17 (120.37–46).

3 Cf. John 14:2.

4 Cf. *In Ezr*. 3.755–66.

5 Cf. Matt. 19:17–19; Mark 10:19.

6 Matt. 24:40–41.

7 Interestingly, the phrase 'Now these are the priests and Levites' (*Hi autem sacerdotes et levitae*) was omitted by the scribe of the Codex Amiatinus. That Bede's text has this line shows, then, that he was not relying upon the text of Amiatinus alone, as his mention of 'our copies' (*nostri codices*) at *In Ezr*. 3.251–53 evidently suggests: see Introduction, pp. xviii–xix.

this time until the beginning of the kingdom of the Macedonians, succeeded each other in turn to the leadership of the priesthood. For there follows:

[Neh. 12:10–11] Jeshua begot Joiakim, Joiakim begot Eliashib, Eliashib begot Joiada, Joiada begot Jonathan, and Jonathan begot Jaddua. In fact, Josephus writes that Jaddua, who was the last of these, was the high priest in the time of Alexander the Great, and when Jaddua with his brethren met him, Alexander received him humbly and with honour. Josephus, who spells his name 'Jaddus', says that he was the father of the high priest Onias,[1] who is mentioned in the Book of Maccabees.[2] This is not to say that Nehemiah, the author of this book, could have lived right up to those times in the flesh, but that he knew Jaddua when he was an infant, and Jaddua could have reached the rank of the priesthood long after Nehemiah's death. For at the end of this book[3] too mention is made of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib, to the effect that **/1500/** one of these was the son-in-law of Sanballat *[377]* the Horonite, though the name of this son-in-law is not recorded. But because this Joiada is the grandfather of Jaddua, it is clear that the son-in-law who is mentioned was either Jaddua's father or paternal uncle, and so he could have been born when Nehemiah was still alive.

[Neh. 12:12] And in the days of Joiakim, these were the priests and heads of the families: of Seraiah's family, Meraiah, and so on. After the succession of the high priests has been described, a catalogue of the lesser priests and Levites who existed in their time is also added so that we may know that after a large number of citizens were gathered in Jerusalem, there was also an excellent and most noble assembly of priests and Levites sufficient to provide for the services of the temple and altar, to confess and praise God, for the guardianship of the temple and city, and to educate the people. And it was not done without the understanding of a more sacred mystery that the rebuilt city of Jerusalem deserved a greater multitude of citizens in every rank and order than it is ever said to have lost when the enemy was attacking and destroying it. For in the same way the Holy Church often receives greater gains from her losses when, by one person's lapse through carelessness into sin, many are frightened by his example and become more careful to continue steadfastly in the purity of the faith; often these

1 Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 11.8.1–7.
2 1 Macc. 12:7.
3 Cf. Neh 13:28.

same people who have sinned begin, after they have done penance, to bear greater fruits of good works than they used to bear before the invasion of sin; often, when the Church has been ravaged by heretics and after she recovers the light of truth through the perseverance of catholic teachers, **/1525/** she has given birth to more sons in order that they might come to know and uphold the reason of this same truth which has been restored. For never would the blessed Fathers Athanasius, Ambrose, Hilary, Augustine and others like them have composed so many and such splendid treatises on Holy Scripture if so much manifold error of heretics had not arisen against the true faith. But as long as heretics were striving to build their falsehood onto the testimonies of the Scriptures, the Fathers from the opposite side were forced to refute them by the authority of these same Scriptures and to discuss how the words of these should be understood rightly. We too, by re-reading these writings of theirs today, receive as it were more vigilant guardians at the gates and vestibules of the holy city and temple and more numerous servants for the office of the altar and sacrifices of the Lord, because through their sayings we are educated for the guardianship of the faith and of good works and for serving attentively in the sight of the divine majesty.[1] This also can be understood mystically concerning the persecution by the Gentiles by which
[378] the Holy Church was very often shaken: for though with the killing of the martyrs she seemed to be on the point of complete destruction, she was built up even better when they were crowned in secret. As miraculous happenings shone forth after their death, even more people would flock to the profession of the faith until the very pinnacle of the worldly empire also agreed to submit its neck to Christ's most agreeable yoke,[2] so that the state of the holy city (i.e. Christ's Church), which had long been assaulted by unbelieving kings, was at last aided and propagated by the perseverance of believing kings and rulers of this world, just as the kings **/1550/** of the Chaldeans (whose name means 'ferocious' or 'like demons')[3] destroyed the city of Jerusalem but the kings of the Persians (who are said to mean 'tempted')[4] restore it with

1 The idea that heretics and the heresies they expound actually serve a providential role by prompting believers to investigate and understand the truths of the faith more deeply in order to defend them is implied by St Paul (1 Cor. 11:19) and stated explicitly by Augustine: see *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 9.20 (CCSL 38:68.16–22).

2 Cf. Matt. 11:30.

3 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:64.22–23).

4 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72: 129.18).

friendly provision and exalt it with due honour.

[Neh. 12:27] At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought out the Levites from all of their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, and so on. The city had been built long before but it was not proper that it be dedicated before the inhabitants had been gathered and ministers suitable for the temple and guardians for the gates and vestibules had been appointed. The holy city, after being built, is dedicated when, after the number of the elect is completed at the end of the world, the Church in its entirety is introduced in heaven to the sight of her Creator, and whenever in this life we are uplifted with desire for that future life, it is as if we are rejoicing over the future dedication of our city. Hence this same dedication also can be interpreted in a twofold way, namely at the present time in the hope of those who desire and purify the eyes of their heart so that they can see God, but then in the reality of blessed men in spiritual bodies who enjoy a vision of God amidst hosts of angelic spirits.

[Neh. 12:27] They sought out, it says, **Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem and to celebrate the dedication with joy and thanksgiving, and with song, on cymbals, harps, and lyres.** Spiritual Levites (that is, those who have been elected to the lot of the kingdom) are sought out too from all their places when the Son of Man *will send his angels and will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends* **/1575/** *of the earth to the ends of heaven*;[1] and they celebrate the dedication with joy and song and thanksgiving and various kinds of musical instruments when they will rejoice each in their turn in the partaking of eternal life, giving thanks to him by whose gift they merited to enter that city; while the cymbals, harps, and lyres can be understood as the very bodies of the righteous already then immortal, through which they will give back the sweetest sounds of their praise to the Lord. But in the present life too the Levites are gathered in Jerusalem when the faithful, aflame with the memory of celestial peace, place the full delight of their mind in this peace[2] and rejoice over that eternal inheritance in heaven which they hope they are going to receive – even though they are not yet able to – by contemplating it or at least desiring it, according to that saying of the psalmist: *Rejoice*, *oh you just, in the* *[379]*

1 Mark 13:27.

2 Jerusalem = 'vision of peace': see Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:121.9–10).

Lord, and confess to the remembrance of his holiness.[1] For they celebrate the dedication with song and thanksgiving when with a mind rejoicing in the Lord they welcome whatever has happened in the world, be it adverse or favourable; they celebrate too with cymbals, harps and lyres when they cause the pleasing sounds of good works to ascend to the ears of their Creator and when they also enkindle the hearts of their neighbours with these to the love of this Creator and Saviour.

[Neh. 12:28] The descendants of the singers therefore were brought together from the plains around Jerusalem and out from the villages of Netophathites, and so on until it says, **for the singers had built villages for themselves in sight of**[2] **Jerusalem.**[3] The descendants of the singers are people who imitate those who, with a devout and cheerful mind, strive to serve the Lord or even **/1600/** to make his word resound by preaching to others. They make villages for themselves around Jerusalem when with an exalted heart they dwell in the vicinity of the celestial homeland, saying: *But our dwelling is in heaven*;[4] and they make these villages in the plains around Jerusalem when the more they humble themselves with their heart laid open to God,[5] the more sweetly do they come to taste the glory of his sublimity. All of them both now, by their progress in good works, individually gather at the celestial homeland, and also at the time of dedication (that is, of perpetual reward) are found there all together.

[Neh. 12:30] And the priests and Levites were purified, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. It is an altogether just sequence of events that the teachers and leaders who desire to cleanse the people should first be purified themselves, that is, they should first of all chasten their own body and bring it into subjection,[6] in case when preaching to others they themselves are found to be at fault. Now the priests and Levites were purified with prayers and offerings of victims and also by abstaining from wives, they purified the people by preaching the same continence, and they also purified the gates and

1 Ps. 97:12 (96:12).

2 'in the sight of' = *in conspectu*, which is likely a corruption for *in circuitu*, 'around', which Bede writes just below at line 1600.

3 Neh. 12:29.

4 Phil. 3:20.

5 *dilatato in Deum corde*: cf. *Regula Benedicti* Prol. 49 (ed. Fry 164), where the phrase *dilatato corde* is used.

6 Cf. 1 Cor. 9:27.

the wall with trumpets and singing of psalms and as they went around the people accompanied them; they purified the people together with themselves and the gates and the wall, after completing a circuit, by offering great victims for the state of the citizens and of the city at the same time. Similarly nowadays, the more those who rule over the common people with holy authority and have been chosen by the Lord for the spiritual ministry remember our dedication, which is in the future resurrection, the more eagerly **/1625/** they strive to purify and sanctify both themselves and all those under their charge, in case by chance anyone is found to have an impure state of mind and is driven out from the common joy of the holy ceremony and cast into the outer darkness with hands and feet bound.[1] *[380]*

[Neh. 12:31] And I made the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall, and I assigned two large choirs of people giving praise. And they went to the right on top of the wall, towards the Dung Gate. The leaders of Judah (i.e. 'confession' or 'praise')[2] are all those more perfect teachers of the Holy Church who at the dedication of the city go up on top of the wall because when the time of retribution appears, they will be proven to have risen above the ordinary life of the Holy Church by their more exalted manner of living. For they are the ones concerning whom the Lord promises this Holy Church through the prophet, saying: *I have posted guardians on your walls*.[3] Hence it is just that those today who have been placed in the office of watchman over the Holy Church's walls will at that time also be distinguished by the glory of this same reward. Two large choirs of those who praise are assigned there because they come from both people (namely Jews and Gentiles) in order to praise God in the heavenly homeland. Any learned person knows that this is done today in the present life as well. These choirs proceed to the right on top of the wall because the righteous, by living rightly, both in the present are always hastening towards everlasting life and arrive there in the future. They proceed towards the Dung Gate in the present in order to purge the filth of sins from the Church by living more correctly and by setting straight the wayward, **/1650/** whereas they will do this in the future in order, by their judicial power, to drive out from the Lord's city (i.e. from the entrance of the heavenly homeland) those who have been unwilling

1 Cf. Matt. 22:13.
2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:67.19).
3 Is. 62:6.

to be corrected; or perhaps the choirs of those who praise, moving to the right, climb on top of the wall towards the Dung Gate whenever they preach that those people are worthy of praise who have taken care to eliminate all impurity from the Church by preaching, refuting, excommunicating, and anathematizing.

[Neh. 12:35] And of the sons of the priests, with trumpets, Zechariah son of Jonathan, and so on until it says, **with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them at the Spring** *[381]* **Gate.**[1] In this life too the sons of the priests sound their trumpets for the dedication of God's city because by preaching they enkindle the hearts of their hearers to remembrance of the celestial homeland; and they do this **with the musical instruments of David the man of God** when, supported not by their own thought or desires but following the life and teaching of the Fathers and Prophets in everything, they persevere in the word of preaching. Ezra the scribe of God's Law goes before them to the Spring Gate when in everything they do they have before their eyes the words of Sacred Scripture so that, constantly guided by these, they can arrive at the entrance of eternal life about which the psalmist says to the Lord: *They shall be inebriated with the plenty of your house, and you shall make them drink of the torrent of your pleasure. For with you is the spring of life.*[2]

[Neh. 12:37] And they went up against them by the steps of the City of David for the ascent of the wall above the house of David and as far as the Water Gate on the east. Above, when the city was being rebuilt, it was said that the ones who built the Water Gate **/1675/** continued the extent of their work **as far as the steps that come down from the city of David**.[3] Thus at the time of building it talks of the descent of the steps, whereas here, at the time of the city's dedication, it talks of an ascent, just as also the former was a time of toil and strife with the enemy, while this was a time of joyous celebration after the enemy had been defeated, doubtless because all the saints who are humbled in this life will under God's powerful hand be exalted by him in the future;[4] those who now build the walls of the Church on earth from living stones (namely, from holy souls) amidst affliction, dangers, and many vigils, afterwards, when the building has been completed

1 Neh. 12:36.
2 Ps. 36:9–10 (35:9–10).
3 Neh. 3:15.
4 1 Pet. 5:6.

and raised to the kingdom of heaven, themselves ascend rejoicing in order to contemplate his brilliance. Now the House of David (i.e. he 'of the strong hand' and the 'desirable one')[1] represents all the righteous, who are wont to be filled with the grace of their Founder and to be inhabited by him, and the sons of the priests go up above the House of David when holy preachers or martyrs, just as they now rise above the ordinary lifestyle of the righteous either through the ministry of the word or through the struggle of martyrdom, so at that time they will surpass the general rewards of those people through the gift of a higher remuneration. Fully in keeping with these people is that parable of the faithful servants, when one of whom says, *'Master, your pound has earned ten pounds'*, the master replies, *'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very small matter, you shall have control over ten cities'*, and when the other one says, *'Master, your pound has earned five pounds'*, and the master answers, *'You also shall have control over five cities'*.[2] For however many people each person now instructs to life whether by his word or example, for these many will each be honoured and appear more glorious at the time when that life is attained. The priests also at last arrive at the Water Gate **/1700/** *[382]* to the east when those who in this present life, *just as a stag desires springs of water*,[3] in the same way have desired to come and to be present before God, achieve their desire and deserve to see the *sun of righteousness*[4] rising without ever setting. Now, the words **And they went up against them**, do not signify opposition or apartness, but meeting or harmony, that harmony with which the elect even in this life enkindle each other to the love of their Creator and in that life more perfectly praise him for ever without tiring, rejoicing together each in turn in their blessedness, in keeping with the example of the Seraphim which, as the prophet attests, cry to each to the other and celebrate the Holy Trinity with shared exultation.[5]

[Neh. 12:37] And the second choir of those giving praise went in the opposite direction. I and half of the people followed them upon the wall, and upon the Tower of the Ovens, and so on. It would take a long time to discuss all the gates and towers individually. Let it suffice to

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:103.11).
2 Luke 19:16–19.
3 Ps. 42:1 (41:2).
4 Cf. Mal. 4:2.
5 Cf. Is. 6:2–3, Rev. 4:8; cf. Rev. 5:11–14 and 7:9–17.

have said that those who completed the gates, towers and city wall amidst great toil, hardship, famine, cold, vigils by day and night while the tireless enemy fights against and assails them, afterwards, once the enemy have been beaten back and thrown into disarray, go walking together through the gates, towers, and buildings of this city and rejoice with songs, hymns, harps, cymbals, lyres, and trumpets and thanksgivings together with those very teachers who were the authors of the project and the teachers of God's Law. No one can doubt that, in the same sequence, this takes place in the spiritual building too when, as the hour of final retribution approaches as though it were the long-desired **/1725/** dedication of God's city, the faithful obtain eternal rewards for their works when, much like Nehemiah and Ezra and the other priests and Levites as they each bring forth their workers, all the teachers of faithful peoples conduct their listeners whom they have acquired for the Lord into the fortifications of the heavenly homeland.[1] Then, as well as the other fortifications of the holy city, Nehemiah also walks with his choir of praisers over the Tower of the Ovens in whose structure they once used to sweat, when teachers of the truth rejoice over the sublime rewards of those whom they have taught. For if the loaves of the furnace which are baked in secret signify the inward devotion of the mind of the faithful which is strengthened by the fire of love, which is why such loaves were also commanded by the Law to be offered as a sacrifice to the Lord,[2] what could be more aptly figured by the ovens in which these loaves are baked than their very hearts which are accustomed always to burn with the flame of
[383] inner love and to beget deeds or words of the virtues? The prophet speaks of this beautifully: *The Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace is in Jerusalem*,[3] and likewise he says of himself, *Was not our heart burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*[4] On the other hand, the hearts of the condemned also burn like this, but in the fire of their sins, which is why another prophet says about them, *They are all adulterers, their hearts like an oven*.[5] Therefore, among other things, the builders of the holy city build the Tower of the Ovens when teachers educate the hearts of their

1 Cf. Bede *Hom*. 2.24 (364.240–365.247).
2 Cf. Lev. 2:4.
3 Is. 31:9.
4 Luke 24:32.
5 Hosea 7:4.

hearers in the faith and work of truth so that they might become worthy to receive the greater gifts of the Spirit and daily **/1750/** bring forth new feasts of the virtues for the joy of God's people; but they rejoice and sing praise to the Lord and proceed upon the Tower of the Ovens on the day of the dedication of Jerusalem when at the time of future retribution they rejoice over the everlasting glory and blessedness of those whom they have educated in life's precepts. And so the ovens are the hearts of the elect in which the love of God is poured out through the Holy Spirit which has been given to them.[1] But the Tower of the Ovens is the very sublimity and guardianship of good works by means of which these hearts, so that they cannot be cut down by evil spirits and so that the flames[2] of the virtues may not be deflected or disturbed by the wind of pride, must always be protected with circumspect caution and solicitude.

[Neh. 12:40] And the two choirs of those who praised stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me, and so on until it says, **And the singers sang loudly.**[3] Having walked around the city's walls and gardens with songs of joy and musical instruments, they return to the Lord's temple so that, while standing there too, they might praise the Lord with resounding trumpets and there fulfil the vows of the dedication by offering victims. The Lord's house mystically represents that one and the same homeland of our future life that the Lord's city also signifies, just as the present Church is habitually called in the Scriptures both Christ's house and his city.[4] But there is a difference – namely, that they are said to have ascended the buildings of the city praising with songs of thanksgiving and with instruments, whereas in the house of God they are said to have praised and sung loudly while standing still. For the elect ascend the walls of the city which they have built when they enter the joys of the heavenly homeland, joys which they themselves **/1775/** have created through their perseverance in good works; they discern the different heights of the gates, steps and buildings when, entering into the Father's house, they contemplate there the diversity of the many mansions for the different merits of people.[5] But they stand still in the house of God

1 Cf. Rom. 5:5.
2 Reading *flammae* for *flamma*: see Appendix 1.
3 Neh. 12:42.
4 Cf. above *In Ezr*. 1.1–4.
5 Cf. John 14:2.

[384] and sing even more loudly when, having each been received in their mansions, they persist with steadfast residency in the everlasting vision of their Creator and with undivided voice celebrate his praises together. In that place, there will be two choirs of people giving thanks: either they will have been bound together from both peoples (as we have interpreted above)[1] and united in one song of divine praise, or they will be made up of angels and human beings, fulfilling the Lord's prophecy in which it is said that human beings will be equal to the angels of God.[2] But in this life too the righteous ascend to the Lord's city with hymns of dedication when, attending with all their heart to being mindful of future remuneration, they daily make more and more progress in good deeds, according to that saying of the psalmist: *He has disposed in his heart an ascent in the vale of tears*;[3] and again: *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord*.[4] For consider that he calls those who walk in the law of the Lord undefiled in the way also, no doubt because they maintain the innocence of heart and works they have received but only in such a way that they constantly strive to grow to higher merits of the virtues. Moreover, they stand in the Lord's house with praises because they persist tirelessly in this very progress of good works, according to the blessed Elijah's words: *The Lord lives, in whose sight I stand*,[5] i.e. in the fulfilment of whose will I endure with an unwearying mind. Moreover, it is well that there follows:

[Neh. 12:42] /1800/ And they sacrificed great victims on that day, and they rejoiced. For on that day of perpetual light about which Zechariah said, *And there shall be one day that is known to the Lord, not day or night*[6] (that is, a day which is remote from the usual experience of passing time), the elect sacrifice great victims to the Lord, namely those about which the psalmist, tasting them in the hope of things to come, said: *You have broken my bonds; I will offer to you the sacrifice of praise*.[7] He properly also reveals where he was hoping that he would offer this sacrifice when he immediately adds, *I will pay my*

1 Cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 3.1641–42.
2 Cf. Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:36.
3 Ps. 84:5–6 (83:6–7).
4 Ps. 119:1 (118:1).
5 1 Kings 17:1.
6 Zech. 14:7.
7 Ps. 116:16–17 (115:16–17).

vows unto the Lord in the courtyards of the Lord's house, in the sight of all his people, in the midst of thee, Oh Jerusalem.[1] For we pay our vows to the Lord in the midst of Jerusalem in the sight of all his people when, in the heavenly homeland, after the whole multitude of the saints has congregated, we offer those praises of thanksgiving to him which in this present life we sigh for and thirst for with daily desire.

[Neh. 12:43] For God had made them joyful with great joy, but their wives and children also rejoiced. These matters truly pertain to that work of building the holy city which is in the future, in which, because God is that king who makes his citizens joyful by his presence, there will assuredly be great joy. Hence when this same king was born in the *[385]* flesh, the angel who appeared to the shepherds said, *For behold, I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people*,[2] no doubt to distinguish this kind of joy from human joy, which is both small and transitory and thus should be considered of no account by those who are wise. Now it is well that the wives of the citizens and also the children are reported to have rejoiced in that joy which God gave to his city, because at the time of the resurrection **/1825/** not only do those who have built the Church either by preaching the word or by persisting resolutely in the works of faith receive the fruit of their great labour, but also all those weaker companions of this same faith rejoice with them in one and the same attainment of eternal life. For *the Lord has blessed all who fear him, both little and great*.[3] This dedication can be interpreted typologically as having begun even in this life for certain people of the elect who, having purified the eye of the heart, deserve to contemplate in some part all those joys that the Church is to gain in the future, as did Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets; as did the apostles who rejoiced to behold the Lord when he was glorified on the holy mountain;[4] as did Paul who merited to be taken up into paradise and the third heaven;[5] as did John in his Apocalypse.[6] The higher all these went up to the upper regions of the heavenly city, the more loudly did they take care to sing the Lord's praises and always to sacrifice the greatest victims of good works to him.

1 Ps. 116:18–19 (115:18–19).
2 Luke 2:10.
3 Ps. 115:13 (113:21).
4 Cf. Matt. 17:1–8.
5 Cf. 2 Cor. 12:2.
6 Cf. Rev. 1:10; 4:1–2.

[Neh. 12:43] They also appointed on that day men over the storerooms of the treasury, for the libations, and for the first-fruits, and for the tithes, so that through these men the rulers of the city might employ priests and Levites for the glory of thanksgiving. As all were rejoicing over the building and dedication of the city, it was arranged with all determination that in this city the practice of religion, which was to be carried out above all in the ceremonies, teaching and duties of the priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, would be preserved and would grow, and for this reason zealous men were appointed to collect money from the people, **/1850/** deposit it in the treasury of the temple, and carefully guard it for the employment of these ministers of the temple and altar. With sedulous care they also were to keep the first-fruits, tithes, and wine for the libations which were brought to the temple, so that with an abundant supply of those things that were either to be offered to the Lord or used to sustain the lives of the Lord's ministers, a multitude of these ministers might more willingly agree to make their dwelling in Jerusalem to teach and sanctify the crowd of people who flocked there.

[386] **[Neh. 12:44] For Judah rejoiced in the priests and Levites who assisted them**, and so on. The reason that the people liked the priests, Levites, and other ministers of holy things to dwell in Jerusalem is that they rejoiced in the good works of those by whose God-devoted perseverance not only had the people been corrected from their sins but also the city rebuilt and dedicated with great praise and joy. On the other hand, the allegorical exposition of this chapter is clear to us because the Lord stated that those *who preach the gospel should live by the gospel*.[1] But woe to those priests and ministers of holy things who are happy to take from the people the payments due to their rank but are not at all eager to labour for the salvation of this same people, nor to offer them any holy guidance by living uprightly, nor to sing of the pleasantness of the heavenly kingdom by preaching something delightful to them; instead, so far from opening the doors of the heavenly city for them by having citizenship in heaven, they are proven rather to shut these doors by acting perversely, and so far from rejoicing in the works of these ministers when confessing or praising the Lord, the people are compelled to be all the more afflicted.[2]

1 1 Cor. 9:14.

2 On the theme of clerical avarice, cf. Bede *In Ezr.* 3.825–37, and the accompanying note.

Certainly we should note **/1875/** that the men of Judah who above were speaking as if in despair over the construction of the city, **'The strength of him who carries has given out, and the rubble is too great, and we will not be able to build the wall'**,[1] and the rest of that passage, had now already regained the strength of both mind and body to remove the rubble that was impeding the building of the wall which had fallen and to defeat the attacks of their enemies which threatened them; and for this reason they deservedly rejoice in the priests and the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers by whose toil and exhortation they have avoided the danger of so considerable an affliction and found so great a glory of restored prosperity. You also, therefore, should you see that your heart is encumbered by the rubble of the vices so that you are unable to build a city there worthy of divine habitation, should you observe that the spiteful enemy wants you to retreat from removing the debris of the vices and from building walls of the virtues – listen to the consolation and counsels of priests, be assiduous in heeding and remembering divine readings, and thus let it be that, having rejected the attacks of the demons, God the victor may enter the abode of your heart, as if he is about to sanctify his city and make his dwelling in you.

[Neh. 12:47] And they sanctified the Levites, and the Levites sanctified the sons of Aaron. The people used to sanctify the Levites by giving tithes to them, as if to the saints of God, and the Levites themselves used to sanctify the priests by offering a tenth part[2] from their own tithes to those who were, so to speak, higher then themselves.

[Neh. 13:1–2] Now on that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people, and there it was found written that the Ammonites and the Moabites should never be admitted into the assembly of God forever, /1900/ because they did not meet the children of Israel with food and water and they hired Balaam to curse them, and so on. It is known that the Moabites and the Ammonites, because they were born from incest,[3] figuratively represent heretics, whose authors through their faulty understanding corrupt the teaching of the Fathers from which they themselves were instructed, just as the daughters of Lot secretly and in darkness and illegitimately use the seed of their father; and for this reason the offspring of such ones (i.e. *[387]*

1 Neh. 4:10.
2 Num. 18:20–32.
3 Cf. Gen. 19:30–38; cf. above *In Ezr*. 3.695–702.

adherents of heresies) can never have any part in the Lord's Church. For those who are set straight from these heresies will no longer be the offspring of such mothers. Now they would meet the children of Israel with food and water as they are coming from Egypt if they themselves, living well and dwelling in catholic peace, were to bestow the solace of God's word upon those who, recently rescued from the servitude of sins through the water of baptism as if through the waves of the sea, are panting for the freedom of the celestial homeland. This is just what Barzillai the Gileadite did: he came with provisions to meet David and his army as they were fleeing from Absalom in order, by reviving and helping them, to make them stronger against the new tyranny of the king's son[1] – signifying, no doubt, those who with the reinforcements of the celestial word take care to strengthen the Church when it is disrupted by heretics and to arouse her to fight against their madness. But while these heretics strive to ruin recent converts both by their own depravities and by revealing the wicked examples or words of others, it is as if, born from incest, they are fighting against the people of Israel who have come out from Egypt both with their own weapons and with the abominable curses and counsels of Balaam the soothsayer (who is interpreted as 'the vanity of the people').[2] But God also **/1925/** turned Balaam's curse[3] into a blessing for his people and defended them from the weapons of the hostile nations, *since all things work together for good for those who love God*.[4]

[Neh. 13:3–4] And it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated every foreigner from Israel. And over this was Eliashib[5] the priest. When they heard the law concerning the anathematizing of the two hostile nations, the faithful people immediately separated every foreigner from them, because we must so direct ourselves to the hearing of the truth, when we are prohibited by divine reading from any particular vice, we must immediately struggle to remove both from our deeds and from our conscience not only the one that happens to

1 2 Sam. 17:27–29.

2 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:79, 20).

3 Num. 22–24.

4 Rom. 8:28.

5 Modern biblical scholars are unsure whether this 'Eliashib the priest' was the same person as 'Eliashib the high priest' mentioned earlier in Neh. 3:1 (see *In Ezr*. 3.211–14), though he may have been: see Myers 1965: 214; and Brockington 1969: 208.

have been mentioned but whatever polluting vice we find in ourselves.
[Neh. 13:5–6] He therefore made himself a large storeroom and there *[388]*
in front of him they were placing the gifts and incense and vessels, and also the tithes of corn, wine, and oil, the portions of the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the first-fruits of the priests. But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, and so on. This sentence, in which Nehemiah writes that he was not in Jerusalem, appears to pertain not to those matters that he had recounted above until this point, but only to the present passage. For during that previous time in which the city was built and dedicated, whatever was done and said seems to relate to when Nehemiah was still dwelling in Jerusalem; and when these things had been completed by his efforts, he returned to the king and it was in his absence that Eliashib made himself a large treasury, in which to store those articles that were necessary either for the ministry of the Lord's house or for the use of the ministers. He **/1950/** did not even fear to put certain illicit objects in the treasury of the Lord's house which Nehemiah, when he returned to Jerusalem, was immediately keen to get rid of, for there follows:
[Neh. 13:7] And I came to Jerusalem, and understood the evil thing Eliashib had done for Tobiah in providing him a storeroom in the vestibule of the house of God. We read above that Tobiah was an Ammonite official hostile to God's people,[1] which is why Eliashib the priest acted very wickedly when, even though he was his relative,[2] he made a storeroom in the vestibule of God's house to place his vessels having cast out from there the vessels of God's house as well as other articles which his service required. *For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?*[3] What fellowship do heretics and schismatics have with the orthodox and peace-loving children of God?

1 Cf. *In Ezr.* 3.695–706.

2 Neh. 13:4 implies that Eliashib and Tobiah were somehow related, so that Eliashib, in providing Tobiah with a chamber in the temple, was in a sense merely showing hospitality to a relative. Ammonites, however, were forbidden by law from association with Jews (see Deut. 23:3) and so were barred from entering the temple. Yet Tobiah had married the daughter of a Jew (see Neh. 6:18) and, so it seems, had successfully insinuated himself into the Jewish community, using this influence to convince Eliashib to allow him into the temple.

3 2 Cor. 6:14–16.

[Neh. 13:8-9] And I cast out the vessels of the house of Tobiah from the storeroom. And I gave orders and they purified the storerooms, and then I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, the sacrifice, and the incense. You also, whatever infidelity and uncleanness you discover among the faithful, immediately cast it out so that after the hearts of believers (which are the Lord's storerooms, since they are full of the riches of the virtues), have been purified, the vessels of the Lord may be brought in – that is to say, those same hearts that just before were vessels of error through sin may again become vessels of the Lord through correction, and there let the sacrifice of good works and the incense of pure prayer be found where before there was a den of thieves.[1] But the vessels of Tobiah the Ammonite are also cast out from the temple storeroom, and God's vessels as well as the sacrifice and the incense are returned to that place by those who, after they have excommunicated or anathematized **/1975/** heretics and false catholics and expelled them from the Church, substitute in their place catholic servants of Christ such as may serve him with faithful deeds
[389] and prayers. Clearly, we ought to compare this zeal of Nehemiah to that of the Lord Saviour when, finding vendors and buyers in the temple, he made a whip from cords and drove them all outside.[2] Nehemiah, in this as in his other undertakings, aptly conveyed a type of the true Consoler and Cleanser.

[Neh. 13:15] In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading winepresses on the sabbath and bringing in grain and loading donkeys with wine and grapes and figs and every kind of load, and they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. And I protested that they should sell on a day on which it is lawful to sell. We are commanded by the Law to do for six days the things that are necessary and to rest on the seventh.[3] The general mystery of this command is clear: namely, that in this world, which lasts for six ages, all the elect should labour for eternal rest, but on a day which is to come, as it were on the seventh, should hope for that rest itself from the Lord.[4] But according to tropology (i.e. the moral sense), the elect even in this life keep the sabbath holy for the Lord when, having separated themselves

1 Cf. Jer. 7:11.

2 Cf. Matt. 21:12; John 2:14–15.

3 Cf. Ex. 20:9–10.

4 Cf. Bede *Hom*. 2.17 (308.297–309.311), for a passage with strong resemblances to this one. On the Six World Ages, cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 1.1201–03 and the accompanying note.

at the appropriate time from worldly concerns, they make time for prayer and raise their minds, which have been purified, to the contemplation of heavenly things. For when we carry out those things that care for the body lawfully demands with a sincere heart and not with desires contrary to the precept of the Apostle,[1] we are, so to speak, performing our necessary work in the six days, since we are occupied with those things that we have need of in this world. Moreover, **/2000/** the sabbath rest of our prayers and devotion, in which we abstain from doing temporal things in order that we may deserve to taste the joys of eternity more sweetly, is rightly assigned to the seventh day because it represents the rest of the future life and of blessed praising. But these foreigners seek to profane the sabbath day when earthly thoughts inopportunely disturb us during the moment of our prayer and through the memory or delight of earthly things strive to take us away from our inmost love. They put wine and grapes and figs and every kind of load on donkeys and bring them into Jerusalem when, weighing down the foolish motions of our minds with carnal delights, they try through these and other such temptations to violate the quietness of our hearts that we devote to God. But Nehemiah speaks against these tumults of unbefitting thoughts to prevent them from disturbing our sabbath when, with the Lord's help, we exclude with careful attention futile and foolish fantasies from our heart at the time of prayer. He protests that they should sell goods of this kind on the day on which it is lawful to sell when a soul that is devoted to God imposes this limitation on its own thoughts: namely, that they should abstain during the *[390]* time of prayer from concerns of transient things, and yet at other times, when the opportunity dictates, turn their gaze not entirely away from those things that pertain to food and clothing but rather deal with these things with appropriate moderation, when necessity requires.

[Neh. 13:16–17] The Tyrians also settled in the city and were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them on the sabbath to the children of Judah and in Jerusalem. And I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this wicked thing /2025/ you are doing, desecrating the sabbath day?' Just as a good fish is devout faith, which whoever asks for it from the Lord in no way receives the serpent of infidelity,[2] so a bad fish is the basest kind of thought that habitually

1 Cf. Rom. 13:14.
2 Cf. Matt. 7:10; Luke 11:11.

immerses itself more than it should in the concerns of this world; and the Tyrians (whose name means 'hemmed in')[1] seek to sell it to us on the sabbath when unclean spirits inopportunely try to sink the restfulness of our devout kind of thought in the deep concerns of the world. But Nehemiah rebukes and chastises the nobles of Judah for such trade when divine inspiration mercifully cleanses those who strive to serve the profession of devotion from thoughts of this sort.

[Neh. 13:19] And so it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem were at rest on the day of the sabbath, I spoke and they shut the gates; and I gave orders that they should not open them until after the sabbath. If our conscience, when purged from the vices, rejoices to have God dwelling in it, rightly can it be called 'Jerusalem'. What are the gates of this Jerusalem if not our bodily senses (namely sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) through which those things that are done outside come to the notice of our mind by entering, so to speak? We are ordered to shut these gates on the day of the sabbath so that when we seek to make time for God by occupying ourselves with psalms and prayers, we drive away from our mind every single thing that is being done outwardly, and alone in secret pray to and praise our judge with a free mind. And since 'no one reaches the top suddenly',[2] but only after the long progress of a holy way of life should one **/2050/** arrive, with the help of Christ's grace, at this perfection and peace of mind of which we speak, it is rightly added concerning these matters:

[Neh. 13:22] And I said to the Levites that they should be purified and should come to guard the gates and to make the sabbath day holy. For those who desire to guard all the doors of their senses from the assault of unruly thought must be cleansed by the daily exercise of good works; and whoever wishes to make the sabbath holy (that is, to make
[391] for himself a profitable leisure-time for prayers, psalmody, holy reading, and weeping) must cleanse his conscience with great care so that he may be able to fulfil his intention to act well. This can also rightly be understood in the allegorical sense concerning teachers of

1 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:149.27); cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 1.1335–36.

2 Gregory the Great *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 2.3.3 (CCSL 142:238.53–55). Bede was evidently fond of this phrase of Gregory, borrowing it often in his exegesis: e.g. *De tab*. 2 (89.1877–82); *De templ*. 2 (225.1300–07); *In Luc*. 4 (270.1552) and 5 (309.547–49); and *In Marc*. 3 (549.286–88). On the spiritual life as a progression through various stages, cf. Bede *In Ezr*. 1.375–79 and the accompanying note.

the faithful. For those who are eager to keep the gates of the Holy Church (i.e. the faith and works of their hearers through which alone one enters the Church) from the contagion of heretics and of vices beating upon them must himself first purify their heart and actions from every stain of error.

[Neh. 13:23–25] Moreover, in those days I saw Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab; and their children spoke partly in the language of Ashdod, and did not know how to speak the language of the Jews, and they spoke in the language of this or that people; and I rebuked them and called curses down on them; and I beat some of the men, and so on. Today too in the Holy Church people marry foreign women whenever they contaminate their conscience with the delights of sins that properly pertain to the Gentiles; and the children born from them do not know how to speak the language of the Jews when the works that have sprung forth from their sinful minds reveal that there is not a shred of devout profession in them but resound with Gentile stupidity rather than ecclesiastical **/2075/** purity. For Azotus (Ashdod), which in Hebrew is called 'Esdod', is interpreted as 'word of fire',[1] and for this reason, according to the tropological sense, the children born from the foreign women speak the language of Ashdod when works engendered through wantonness await the punishment of eternal burning. Hence rightly the fathers of such ones were not only reproached and cursed by Nehemiah but some of them also beaten, because it is necessary that the erring should be more severely restrained by teachers of the truth so that they learn to be transferred by a favourable change from the word of chastising fire to the word of divine praise. But also when heretics pay attention to the studies of Gentile philosophy, dialectic and rhetoric[2] more than to ecclesiastical simplicity one should not marvel if their hearers should speak the language of this or that people, paying lip service to Holy Scripture's words but interpreting them with a misguided and Gentile understanding.

[Neh. 13:30–31] So I purified them from all the foreigners, and I appointed orders of priests and Levites, each in their own ministry, and for the offering of wood at designated times, and for the first-fruits. Remember me with favour, Oh my God. It is in all respects an apt and

1 Cf. Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* (CCSL 72:143, 3–5).

2 On Bede's attitude towards classical learning, cf. *In Ezr*. 1.969–75.

appropriate end to the work of building the holy city and the temple of the Lord that when the citizens have been purified by God from all the filth of foreign pollution, which is alien to God, the orders of the priests and the Levites should be duly preserved in their own ministry
[392] in order that the teachers of the Church who have been instructed according to rule may continually exhort the people now cleansed from all sin to remain henceforth in goodness and to grow. Among other things, the people offer wood to the Lord to feed the fire of the altar **/2100/** when they perform works of virtues that are assuredly worthy of divine consecration. For if wood did not sometimes symbolize something good the prophet would not say: *Then shall all the wood of the forests rejoice in the presence of the Lord*.[1] Now the wood burns and is consumed in the altar of holocausts when in the hearts of the elect works of righteousness are perfected in the flame of love. Rightly, therefore, does the founder and dedicator of such a city, after the many labours of his devotion, commend himself to the memory of his Creator and provider of all good things. And you, *highest father of lights*,[2] by whom every excellent thing is given and from whom every perfect gift descends, you who have given me, the humblest of your servants, both the love and the aid to consider the wonders of your law,[3] and have manifested to me, unworthy though I am, the grace not only to grasp the ancient offerings in the treasury of this prophetic book but also to discover new ones[4] beneath the veil of the old and to bring them forth for the use of my fellow servants – **Remember me with favour, oh my God**.[5]

1 Ps. 96:12–13 (95:12–13).

2 Cf. Jam. 1:17.

3 Cf. Ps. 119:18 (118:18).

4 Cf. Matt. 13:52. There is perhaps also an echo here of *Regula Benedicti* 64.9, which quotes this verse: 'Oportet ergo eum esse doctum lege divina, ut sciat et sit unde *proferat nova et vetera*' ('He ought, therefore, to be learned in the divine law, so that he has a treasury of knowledge from which he can *bring out what is new and old*', trans. Fry 283). Morever, the statement is of further interest in attesting to Bede's own sense of his authorial role: it was not limited to summarizing the thoughts of others but, as he implies here, could involve the development and expression of his own insights into the biblical text.

5 Neh. 13:10; cf. Neh. 5:19. *On Ezra and Nehemiah* is the only Bedan commentary that concludes with a first-person prayer. As suggested (see Introduction, p. xli–xlii), this could provide further support for my suggestion that *On Ezra and Nehemiah* is a late work. Indeed, this prayer constitutes yet another link to another undoubtedly late work, the *Ecclesiastical History*, which concludes in a similar fashion: see *HE* 5.24 (570).

APPENDIX 1
NOTES ON TEXTUAL EMENDATIONS

A = British Library Arundel 37, s.ix/x (ends at *In Ezr*. 3.407)
R = British Library Royal 3 A XII (Cirencester, 1147/1176)

Book / Line	CCSL 119A: 237–392	PL 91.807B–924C	Correction
1.1335, 1339	coangustiati	coangustiati	coangustati
1.1430	superamus	sperantes	speramus (R in margin)
1.1507	aedificat	aedificant	aedificant
1.1653	quae	quae	quam
1.1678	religatus	relegatus	relegatus
1.1732	quidam	quidem	quidem
1.1794	accedens	accendens	accendens (A and R)
2.54	revereantur	revereantur	revertantur
2.62	quod	quos	quos
2.191	obstupescere	obstupescere	obstupescunt (R)
2.287	fratres	fratres	patres
2.383	Aderint	Aderit	Aderit
2.1019	et Bethleem	in Bethlehem	in Babiloniam (A) in Babilonem (R)
2.1026	fortia… forma extinguere	om. forma	fortia… et firma extinguere
2.1100	consialiatores	consiliatores	consiliatores
2.1161	et	et	ut (A and R)
2.1466	gentes	gentes	gratiam agentes (R)

2.1750	habebunt	habebunt	habemus
2.1993	reprobasse	reprobasse	reproba esse
3.314	iuvendo	vivendo	vivendo
3.568	habitabat	habitant	habitant
3.700	immundiatia	immunditia	immunditia
3.856	ipse	ipse	ipsum
3.857	elemosinam… dandam	eleemosynam… dandam	elemosinam… dando
3.1207	de tabernaculis nostris	de habitaculis nostris	de habitaculis nostris
3.1293	exoptissima	exoptatissima	exoptatissima
3.1385	magni	magis	magis
3.1758	flamma	flamma	flammae

APPENDIX 2
THE EZRA MINIATURE

Renowned for being the oldest extant complete Vulgate Bible, the Codex Amiatinus is also famed for its opening quire of decorative pages. One of these (fol. Vr) joined Bede's commentary in fostering Ezra's acclaim in eighth-century Northumbria. It contains a painted miniature of a scribe in the guise of a Jewish priest; seated in front of a cupboard containing nine volumes, he writes in a book on his lap, the floor around him strewn about with the tools of his scribal trade. At the top of the page a couplet identifies the figure as Ezra restoring holy scripture: *Codicibus sacris hostili clade perustis / Esdra Deo fervens hoc reparavit opus* ('After the sacred books were destroyed by enemy devastation, / Ezra, in his zeal for God, restored this work').[1] Although crafted at Wearmouth–Jarrow sometime before 716 quite probably under the direction of Bede himself, this famous miniature has long been discussed primarily with reference to Cassiodorus and the intellectual and artistic programme of sixth-century Vivarium, as much scholarship has sought to locate its exemplar there.[2] No attempt can be made in this short appendix to take stock of this or other aspects of the miniature's critical history, nor will space be devoted to the problems surrounding other parts of Amiatinus's opening quire.[3] In keeping with the aim of the present volume, our focus must remain Bede's commentary, which, surprisingly, many commentators on the miniature have ignored. Accordingly, what follows will address a few pertinent connections that obtain between them.

First, Bede's words *hostili clade perustae* ('destroyed by enemy

1 See the front cover of this volume. For a good colour reproduction, see Marsden 1995b.

2 On the miniature's connection to Cassiodorus and the Codex Grandior, see Bruce-Mitford 1967; Merten 1987; Meyvaert 1996; Henderson 1993 and 1999: 77–87; Marsden 1995a: 120–21 and 1995b; O'Reilly 2001; and Vessey 2003: 67–71 and 2004: 7–12. For other views, see Nordhagen 1977; Corsano 1987; Nees 1999; and Chazelle 2003.

3 For a range of opinion on the first quire, see Bruce-Mitford 1967; Corsano 1987; Meyvaert 1996; and Chazelle 2003.

devastation') in Book 2 echo a portion of the couplet above the miniature.[1] Because the full couplet appears word for word in a poem by Alcuin (Carmina 69), it was once thought to be authored by him and added to the miniature later. However, in an article published in 1995, Paul Meyvaert suggested that the appearance of this quotation in Book 2 of Bede's commentary, along with comparable echoes of the wording elsewhere in his oeuvre, constitutes sufficient evidence for Bedan authorship of the couplet.[2] Whether Bede composed it specifically for inclusion in the miniature or adapted it from something else he had composed, and what we might infer from the verbal overlap about the miniature's chronological relation to the commentary, are less easy to resolve. Meyvaert, in a more recent discussion, has claimed further that the overlap in fact indicates that the commentary was written early, between the years 711–715 when Amiatinus was being prepared, and that Bede's remarks in Book 2 served as the source from which the couplet, added to the miniature just before Amiatinus left from Rome, was crafted.[3] But the attractiveness of such a scenario does not make it true. We saw that there is credible evidence for dating the commentary much later than circa 715.[4] Moreover, as proof for dating the commentary, such meagre verbal overlap is in my view far from a conclusive piece of evidence. Whether Bede borrowed the couplet from some unidentified exemplar or composed it himself, there is nothing to compel the conclusion that he made use of it *only* during the years 711–715; presumably he could have retrieved or recalled and redeployed it at any time during the remaining nineteen years before his death in 735. And even if while he did work on both the image and the commentary early in his career, there is no reason that his early work on Ezra and Amiatinus could not have led him to think about Ezra over a period of years, with the commentary in its complete three-book format emerging later on as the matured fruit of that reflection and forming part of a larger exegetical project that included *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*.

Moving from chronological to thematic associations puts us on a more solid ground for connecting the two productions. For example,

1 See *In Ezr*. 2.774–75 and the accompanying note.

2 See Meyvaert 1996: 877; also Marsden 1995a: 121–22. On Bede's involvement with Amiatinus, see Marsden 1998

3 See Meyvaert 2005: 1098–99. On other arguments for an early date, see Introduction, pp. xxxviii–xli.

4 See Introduction, pp. xxxix–xlii.

the emphasis on the dual roles of priest and scribe, plainly visualized in the miniature, is also at the centre of Bede's exegetical treatment of Ezra; there is no need for Vivarium to make sense of them.[1] Wearmouth–Jarrow possessed one of the greatest scriptorium in the early medieval West; what better emblem was there of scribal zeal and scriptural learning for its biblical scholars to identify with than Ezra *scriba velox* ('the swift scribe') who, Bede informs us, single-handedly rewrote the whole run of the Scriptures destroyed in the Chaldean sack of Jerusalem.[2] In thematizing this detail, drawn not from Ezra–Nehemiah but from non-canonical and exegetical sources,[3] both commentary and miniature converge in characterizing Ezra as an adept textual scholar, the latter picturing something of what the former explains: that in restoring the canon, Ezra the scribe had added material to some texts, chose not to re-edit others, and even devised his own special script to speed along the re-writing process.[4] For the Northumbrian scholars who crafted the Codex Amiatinus and the other pandects, and not least for Bede himself, Ezra's editorial activities thus provided, in Jennifer O'Reilly's words, 'a practical context'[5] for their own scholarly endeavours.

Yet, while the Wearmouth–Jarrow scribes, as fellows in the trade, could no doubt appreciate such textual activities in and of themselves, Bede's commentary, by connecting Ezra's scribal endeavours with the spiritual reform of his people,[6] suggests that the figure depicted in the miniature may have been designed to represent much more, a symbol of this Northumbrian community's charge to preach and teach God's Word to the people. Indeed, Wearmouth–Jarrow's corporate concern not only with the preservation and transmission of Scripture, but equally with its propagation to wider audiences, evident in Bede's own exegetical undertakings, can be profitably understood as a latter-day extension, if not the purposeful re-enactment of, Ezra's own edifying scribal mission.[7]

1 Indeed, to my knowledge we lack any evidence to suggest that Cassiodorus considered Ezra an important figure.

2 See *In Ezr*. 2.791–821.

3 See *In Ezr*. 2.791–821 and the accompanying notes.

4 See *In Ezr*. 2.796–821.

5 O'Reilly 2001: 28; on Bede's involvement in Amiatinus's production, see Marsden 1998 and Meyvaert 1995.

6 See *In Ezr*. 2.772–78 and the accompanying note; also Introduction, pp. xxxi–xxxvi.

7 On Bede as a 'Northumbrian Ezra', see Introduction, p. xxxv and DeGregorio 2004: 16–18.

Surely these contemporary ramifications found in Bede's treatment of Ezra's scribal vocation would not have been far from the minds of the Northumbrian artists who crafted the miniature. Placed prominently in Amiatinus's opening quire, Ezra the scribe thus does not simply prefigure Christ the Heavenly Scribe, whose image appears in Amiatinus before the New Testament; he also registers Bede's and Wearmouth–Jarrow's own sense of its Ezra-like charge to spread the Word through texts and teaching.

Concerning the role of priest, much debate has surrounded the priestly dress worn by the figure in the miniature. The standard view is that his jewelled breast-plate and the head-dress are meant to identify him as a *pontifex* or high priest. Paul Meyvaert has argued that this high-priestly component of the image is attributable to Bede and the Wearmouth–Jarrow artists, who, unaware that the portrait in their exemplar represented Cassiodorus, concluded that it must be Ezra and decided to clarify this by vesting him with high-priestly insignia. As support for this hypothesis, Meyvaert cites Bede's reference to Ezra as *pontifex* in his *Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings* as proof that Bede earlier on erroneously believed Ezra was really a high priest, a view Meyvaert believes Bede later corrected when he came to write on Ezra–Nehemiah.[1]

While the priestly outfit may be attributable to Bede, one may question whether it was meant to represent Ezra as an actual high priest or that Bede was muddled in calling Ezra a *pontifex*. In the first place, that the figure in the miniature is not literally intended to represent a high priest is evident insofar as he wears only two of the eight vestments specified in Exodus 28:4, namely the breast-plate and head-dress.[2] But if these two insignia were not intended to indicate Ezra's high-priesthood, what else could they mean? Here, Bede's commentary and other exegetical writings are invaluable, for they direct our attention not to the literal meaning of these garments, but to their spiritual interpretation. Hence, in the commentary, Bede states that the head-dress signifies 'the dignity of the priesthood',[3] while in his more extended meditation on the priestly vestments in *De tabernaculo* he points out that the reason a priest must wear a head-

1 Meyvaert 1996: 870–77 and 1997: 285.
2 See O'Reilly 2001: 20.
3 *In Ezr*. 3.1886–89.

dress is '…so that he may be admonished by this garment to consecrate all the senses of his head to God, lest his eyes should look to vanity'.[1] In that same work, he identifies the breast-plate with 'the priest's heart and thoughts',[2] and equates the garments protecting the chest with the priest's constant need to 'discern good from evil with careful examination'.[3] And the breast-plate is studded with gems, he says, so that for all people the priest will always 'exhibit both confession of true faith and the examples of good action, so that by imitating his right faith and action they may themselves also merit to be made members of the High Priest'.[4]

For Bede, then, these high-priestly insignia may be said to denote religious leadership. In the miniature, they accordingly serve to underscore Ezra's role as *pontifex*, not in the sense of a real high priest, but rather in Bede's notable reformist definition of the word: *pontifex, id est archiepiscopus* ('a *pontifex*, i.e. an archbishop'). That is to say, the miniature with its priestly and scribal ornaments is a pictorial allegory: it reveals Ezra as a special hieratic figure to be sure, yet in terms meant not to characterize him historically, but rather to translate his relevance into the contemporary moment as a symbol of religious authority.[5] The Ezra of the miniature, like the Ezra of Bede's commentary, is at once scribe and teacher and pontifical leader: miniature and commentary are thus of a piece in their depictions of this Old Testament figure. Thus, even if we do have something in the miniature that goes back ultimately to Cassiodorus and Vivarium, reading it in the light of Bede's commentary shows still more that we have something traceable to the intellectual and spiritual values of Wearmouth–Jarrow itself, whose artists, scribes and house author joined together in forging and promoting an image of Ezra as a culturally and ideologically relevant figure.

1 *De tab.* 3 (117.932–35); trans. Holder 135.

2 *De tab.* 3 (102.383–86); trans. Holder 118.

3 *De tab.* 3 (102.391–103.395); trans. Holder 118.

4 *De tab.* 3 (104.456–60); trans. Holder 120.

5 For more on this interpretation, Introduction, pp. xxxiii–xxxv and DeGregorio 2004: 18–20.

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